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THE SKIPPER'S WOOING

BY

W. W. JACOBS

CHEAP EDITION.

LONDON
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1904

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CONTENTS

THE SKIPPER'S WOOING

		PAGE
CHAPTER	I.	1
,,	II.	7
,,	III.	12
,,	IV.	20
,,	V.	24
,,	VI.	32
,,	VII.	37
,,	VIII.	43
,,	IX.	49
,,	X.	55
,,	XI.	60
,,	XII.	65
,,	XIII.	71

THE BROWN MAN'S SERVANT

		PAGE
CHAPTER	I.	81
,,	II.	87
,,	III.	92
,,	IV.	96

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THE SKIPPER'S WOOING

CHAPTER I

THE schooner *Seamew*, of London, Captain Wilson, master and owner, had just finished loading at Northfleet with cement for Brittlesea. Every inch of space was packed. Cement, exuded from the cracks, imparted to the hairy faces of honest seamen a ghastly appearance sadly out of keeping with their characters, and even took its place, disguised as thickening, among the multiple ingredients of a sea-pie that was cooking for dinner.

It was not until the decks were washed and the little schooner was once more presentable that the mate gave a thought to his own toilet. It was a fine, warm morning in May, and some of the cargo had got into his hair and settled in streaks on his hot, good-humoured face. The boy had brought aft a wooden bucket filled with fair water, and placed upon the hatch by its side a piece of yellow soap and a towel. Upon these preparations the mate smiled pleasantly, and throwing off his shirt and girding his loins with his braces, he bent over and with much zestful splashing began his ablutions.

Twice did the ministering angel, who was not of an age to be in any great concern about his own toilet, change the water before the mate was satisfied; after which the latter, his face and neck aglow with friction, descended to the cabin for a change of raiment.

He did not appear on deck again until after dinner, which, in the absence of the skipper, he ate alone. The men, who had also dined, were lounging forward, smoking, and the mate, having filled his own pipe, sat down by himself and smoked in silence.

"I'm keeping the skipper's dinner 'ot in a small sorsepan, sir," said the cook, thrusting his head out of the galley.

"All right," said the mate.

"It's a funny thing where the skipper gets to these times," said the cook, addressing nobody in particular, but regarding the mate out of the corner of his eye.

"Very rum," said the mate, who was affably inclined just then.

The cook came out of the galley, and, wiping his wet hands on his dirty canvas trousers, drew near and gazed in a troubled fashion ashore.

"'E's the best cap'n I ever sailed under," he said slowly. "Ain't it struck you, sir, he's been worried like these 'ere last few trips? I told 'im as 'e was goin' ashore as there was sea-pie for dinner, and 'e ses, 'All right, Joe,' 'e ses, just as if I'd said boiled beef and taters, or fine mornin', sir, or anythink like that!"

The mate shook his head, blew out a cloud of smoke and watched it lazily as it disappeared.

"It strikes me as 'ow 'e's arter fresh cargo or somethin'," said a stout old seaman who had joined the cook. "Look 'ow 'e's dressing nowadays! Why, the cap'n of a steamer ain't smarter!"

"Not so smart, Sam," said the remaining seaman, who, encouraged by the peaceful aspect of the mate, had also drawn near. "I don't think it's cargo he's after, though—cement pays all right."

"It *ain't* cargo," said a small but confident voice.

"You clear out!" said old Sam "A boy o' your age shovin' his spoke in when 'is elders is talkin'! What next, I wonder!"

"Where am I to clear to? I'm my own end of the ship anyway," said the youth vindictively.

The men started to move, but it was too late. The mate's latent sense of discipline was roused and he jumped up in a fury.

"My ——!" he said, "if there ain't the whole blasted ship's company aft—every man Jack of 'em! Come down in the cabin, gentlemen, come down and have a drop of Hollands and a cigar apiece. All the riffraff o' the foc'sle sitting aft and prattling about the skipper like a parcel o' washerwomen. And smoking, by ——! *smoking!* Well, when the skipper comes aboard he'll have to get a fresh crew or a fresh mate. I'm sick of it. Why, it might be a barge for all the discipline that's kept! The boy's the only sailor among you."

He strode furiously up and down the deck; the cook disappeared into the galley, and the two seamen began to bustle about forward. The small expert who had raised the storm, by no means desirous of being caught in the tail of it, put his pipe in his pocket and looked round for a job.

"Come here!" said the mate sternly.

The boy came towards him.

"What was that you were saying about the skipper?" demanded the other.

"I said it wasn't cargo he was after," said Henry.

"Oh, a lot you know about it!" said the mate.

Henry scratched his leg, but said nothing.

"A lot you know about it!" repeated the mate in rather a disappointed tone.

Henry scratched the other leg.

"Don't let me hear you talking about your superior officer's affairs again," said the mate sharply. "Mind that!"

"No, sir," said the boy humbly. "It ain't my business, o' course."

"What isn't your business?" said the mate carelessly.

"His," said Henry.

The mate turned away seething, and hearing a chuckle from the galley, went over there and stared at the cook—a wretched being with no control at all over his feelings—for quite five minutes. In that short space of time he discovered that the galley was the dirtiest hole under the sun and the cook the uncleanest person that ever handled food. He imparted his discoveries to the cook, and after reducing him to a state of perspiring imbecility, turned round and rated the men again. Having charged them with insolence when they replied, and with sulkiness when they kept silent, he went below, having secured a complete victory, and the incensed seamen, after making sure that he had no intention of returning, went towards Henry to find fault with *him*.

"If you was my boy," said Sam, breathing heavily, "I'd thrash you to within a inch of your life."

"If I was your boy I should drown myself," said Henry very positively.

Henry's father had frequently had occasion to remark that his son favoured his mother, and his mother possessed a tongue which was famed throughout Wapping, and obtained honourable mention in distant Limehouse.

"You can't expect discipline aboard a ship where the skipper won't let you 'it the boy," said Dick moodily. "It's bad for 'im too."

"Don't you worry about me, my lads," said Henry with offensive patronage. "I can take care of myself all right. You ain't seen *me* come aboard so drunk that I've tried to get down the foc'sle without shoving the scuttle back. You never knew *me* to buy a bundle o' forged pawn-tickets. You never——"

"Listen to 'im," said Sam, growing purple. "I'll be 'ung for 'im yet."

"If you ain't, I will," growled Dick, with whom the matter of the pawn-tickets was a sore subject.

"Boy!" yelled the mate, thrusting his head out of the companion.

"Coming, sir!" said Henry. "Sorry I can't stop any longer," he said politely; "but me an' the mate's going to have a little chat."

"I'll have to get another ship," said Dick, watching the small spindly figure as it backed down the companion-ladder.

"I never was on a ship afore where the boy could do as he liked."

Sam shook his head and sighed. "It's the best ship I was ever on, barrin' that," he said sternly.

"What'll 'e be like when he grows up?" demanded Dick, as he lost himself in the immensity of the conjecture. "It ain't right t' the boy to let him go on like that. One good hidin' a week would do 'im good and us too."

Meantime the object of their care had reached the cabin, and, leaning against the fireplace, awaited the mate's pleasure.

"Where's the cap'n?" demanded the latter, plunging at once into the subject.

Henry turned and looked at the small clock.

"Walkin' up and down a street in Gravesend," he said deliberately.

"Oh, you've got the second-sight, I s'pose," said the mate reddening. "And what's he doing that for?"

"To see 'er come out," said the boy.

The mate restrained himself, but with difficulty.

"And what'll he do when she does come out?" he asked.

"Nothin'," replied the seer with conviction. "What are you lookin' for?" he inquired, with a trace of anxiety in his voice, as the mate rose from the locker, and, raising the lid, began groping for something in the depths.

"Bit o' rope," was the reply.

"Well, what did yer ask me for?" said Henry with hasty tearfulness. "It's the truth. 'E won't do nothin'; 'e never does—only stares."

"D'you mean to say you ain't been gammoning me?" demanded the mate, seizing him by the collar.

"Come and see for yourself," said Henry.

The mate released him, and stood eyeing him with a puzzled expression as a thousand-and-one little eccentricities on the part of the skipper suddenly occurred to him.

"Go and make yourself tidy," he said sharply; "and mind if I find you've been doing me I'll flay you alive."

The boy needed no second bidding. He dashed up on deck and, heedless of the gibes of the crew, began a toilet such as he had never before been known to make within the memory of man.

"What's up, kiddy?" inquired the cook, whose curiosity became unbearable.

"Wot d'you mean?" demanded Henry with dignity.

"Washin', and all that," said the cook, who was a plain creature.

"Don't you ever wash yourself, you dirty pig?" said Henry elegantly. "I s'pose you think doin' the cookin' keeps you clean, though."

The cook wrung his hands, and, unconscious of plagiarism, told Sam he'd be 'ung for 'im.

"Me and the mate are goin' for a little stroll, Sam," observed the youth as he struggled into his jersey. "Keep your eyes open, and don't get into mischief. You can give Slushy a 'and with the sorsepans if you've got nothin' better to do. Don't stand about idle."

The appearance of the mate impeded Sam's utterance, and he stood silently by the others watching the couple as they clambered ashore. It was noticed that Henry carried his head very erect, but whether this was due to the company he was keeping or the spick-and-span appearance he made, they were unable to determine.

"Easy—go easy," panted the mate, mopping his red face with a handkerchief. "What are you in such a hurry for?"

"We shall be too late if we don't hurry," said Henry; "then you'll think I've been tellin' lies."

The mate made no further protest, and at the same rapid pace they walked on until they reached a quiet road on the outskirts of Gravesend.

"There he is!" said Henry triumphantly, as he stopped and pointed up the road at the figure of a man slowly pacing up and down. "She's at a little school up at the other end. A teacher or somethin'. Here they come."

As he spoke a small damsel with a satchel and a roll of music issued from a house at the other end of the road, the advanced guard of a small company which in twos and threes now swarmed out and went their various ways.

"Nice girls, some of 'em!" said Henry, glancing approvingly at them as they passed. "Oh, here she comes! I can't say I see much in her myself."

The mate looked up and regarded the girl as she approached with considerable interest. He saw a pretty girl with nice gray eyes and a flush, which might be due to the master of the *Seamew*—who was following at a respectful distance behind her—trying to look unconcerned at this unexpected appearance.

"Halloa, Jack!" he said carelessly.

"Halloa!" said the mate, with a great attempt at surprise. "Who'd ha' thought o' seeing you here!"

The skipper, disdaining to reply to this hypocrisy, stared at Henry until an intelligent and friendly grin faded slowly from that youth's face and left it expressionless. "I've just been having a quiet stroll," he said, slowly turning to the mate.

"Well, so long!" said the latter, anxious to escape.

The other nodded, and turned to resume his quiet stroll at a pace which made the mate hot to look at him. "He'll have

to look sharp if he's going to catch her now," he said thoughtfully.

"He won't catch her," said Henry; "he never does—leastways if he does he only passes and looks at her out of the corner of his eye. He writes letters to her of a night, but he never gives 'em to her."

"How do you know?" demanded the other.

"Cos I look at 'im over his shoulder while I'm puttin' things in the cupboard," said Henry.

The mate stopped and regarded his hopeful young friend fixedly.

"I s'pose you look over my shoulder too sometimes?" he suggested.

"You never write to anybody except your wife," said Henry carelessly, "or your mother. Leastways I've never known you to."

"You'll come to a bad end, my lad," said the mate thickly; "that's what you'll do."

"What 'e does with 'em *I* can't think," continued Henry, disregarding his future. "'E don't give 'em to 'er. Ain't got the pluck, I s'pose. Phew! Ain't it 'ot!"

They had got down to the river again, and he hesitated in front of a small beer-shop whose half-open door and sanded floor offered a standing invitation to passers-by.

"Could you do a bottle o' ginger-beer?" inquired the mate, attracted in his turn.

"No," said Henry shortly, "I couldn't. I don't mind having what you're going to have."

The mate grinned, and, leading the way in, ordered refreshment for two, exchanging a pleasant wink with the proprietor as that humorist drew the lad's half-pint in a quart pot.

"Ain't you goin' to blow the head off, sir?" inquired the landlord as Henry, after glancing darkly into the depths and nodding to the mate, buried his small face in the pewter. "You'll get your moustache all mussed up if you don't."

The boy withdrew his face, and wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, regarded the offender closely. "So long as it don't turn it red I don't mind," he said patiently, "and I don't think as 'ow your swipes would hurt anythin'."

He went out, followed by the mate, leaving the landlord wiping down the counter with one hand while he mechanically stroked his moustache with the other. By the time a suitable retort occurred to him the couple were out of earshot.

CHAPTER II

Captain Wilson, hot with the combined effects of exercise and wrath, continued the pursuit, but the pause to say sweet nothings to the second in command was fatal to his success. He had often before had occasion to comment ruefully upon the pace of the quarry, and especially at such times when he felt that he had strung his courage almost up to speaking point. To-day he was just in time to see her vanish into the front garden of a small house, upon the door of which she knocked with expressive vigour. She disappeared into the house just as he reached the gate.

"Damn the mate!" he said irritably—"and the boy," he added, anxious to be strictly impartial.

He walked on aimlessly at a slow pace until the houses ended and the road became a lane shaded with tall trees and flanked by hawthorn hedges. Along this he walked a little way, and then, nervously fingering a note in his jacket pocket, retraced his steps.

"I'll see her and speak to her anyway," he muttered. "Here goes."

He walked slowly back to the house, and, with his heart thumping, and a choking sensation in his throat, walked up to the door and gave a little whisper of a knock upon it. It was so faint that, after waiting a considerable time, he concluded that it had not been heard, and raised the knocker again. Then the door opened suddenly, and the knocker, half detained in his grasp, slipped from his fingers and fell with a crash that made him tremble at his hardihood. An elderly woman with white hair opened the door. She repressed a start and looked at him inquiringly.

"Cap'n Jackson in?" inquired the skipper, his nerves thoroughly upset by the knocker.

"Who?" said the other.

"Cap'n Jackson," repeated the skipper, reddening.

"There is no such man here," said the old woman. "Are you sure it is Captain Jackson you want?" she added.

"I'm—I'm not sure," said Wilson truthfully.

The old woman looked at him eagerly. "Will you come in?" she said slowly, and, without giving him time to refuse, led the way into the small front-room. The skipper followed her with the conscience of a fox invited into a poultry yard, and bringing up in the doorway, gazed uncomfortably at the girl who had risen at his entrance.

"This gentleman is inquiring for a Captain Jackson," said the old woman, turning to the girl. "I thought he—he

doesn't seem quite sure whether it is Captain Jackson he wants—he may bring news," she concluded incoherently.

"It's not likely, mother," said the girl, regarding the adventurous mariner by no means favourably. "There is no Captain Jackson here, sir."

"Have you been looking for him long?" inquired the mother.

"Years and years," said the other, forgetting himself.

The old woman sighed sympathetically. "Won't you sit down?" she said.

"Thank you," said the skipper, and took the edge of the sofa.

"You're not quite certain of the name?" suggested the girl coldly.

"It—it sounded like Jackson," murmured the intruder in a small, modest voice. "It might have been Blackson, or Dackson, or even Snackson—I won't swear to it."

The old woman put her hand to her brow. "I thought perhaps you might have brought me some news of my poor husband," she said at length. "I lost him some years ago, and when you came here inquiring for a seafaring man I thought you might somehow have brought news."

"You must see, mother, that this gentleman is looking for somebody else," said the girl; "you are hindering him from finding Captain Jackson."

"If he's been looking for him for years," said the old woman, bridling mildly, "a few minutes will not make much difference."

"Certainly not," said Wilson, in a voice which he tried in vain to make stronger. "When you say lost, ma'am, you mean missing?"

"Five years," said the old woman, shaking her head and folding her hands in her lap. "How long do you say you've been looking for Captain Jackson?"

"Seven," said the skipper with a calmness which surprised himself.

"And you haven't given up hope, I suppose?"

"Not while life lasts," said the other, studying the carpet.

"That's the way I feel," said the old woman energetically. "What a surprise it'll be when you meet him!"

"For both of them," said the girl.

"It's five years last May—the 20th of May," said the old woman, "since I last saw my poor husband. He——"

"It can't be of any interest to this gentleman, mother," interposed the girl.

"I'm very much interested, ma'am," said the skipper defiantly; "besides, when I'm looking for poor Jackson, who knows I mightn't run up against the other."

'Ah! who knows but what you might," said the old woman. "There's one gentleman looking for him now—Mr. Glover, my daughter's husband that is to be."

There was a long pause, then the skipper, by dint of combining his entire stock of Christianity and politeness, found speech. "I hope he finds him," he said slowly.

"All that a man can do he's doing," said the old lady. "He's a commercial traveller by trade, and he gets about a great deal in the way of business."

"Have you tried advertising?" inquired the skipper, striving manfully to keep his interest up to its former pitch.

The other shook her head and looked uneasily at her daughter.

"It wouldn't be any good," she said in a low voice—"it wouldn't be any good."

"Well, I don't want to pry into your business in any way," said Wilson, "but I go into a good many ports in the course of the year, and if you think it would be any use my looking about I'll be pleased and proud to do so, if you'll give me some idea who to look for."

The old lady fidgeted with all the manner of one half desiring and half fearing to divulge a secret.

"You see we lost him in rather peculiar circumstances," she said, glancing uneasily at her daughter again. "He——"

"I don't want to know anything about that, you know, ma'am," interposed the skipper gently.

"It would be no good advertising for my father," said the girl in her clear voice, "because he can neither read nor write. He is a very passionate, hasty man, and five years ago he struck a man down and thought he had killed him. We have seen nothing and heard nothing of him since."

"He must have been a strong man," commented the skipper.

"He had something in his hand," said the girl, bending low over her work. "But he didn't hurt him really. The man was at work two days after, and he bears him no ill-will at all."

'He might be anywhere," said the skipper, meditating.

"He would be sure to be where there are ships," said the old lady; "I'm certain of it. You see he was captain of a ship himself a good many years, and for one thing he couldn't live away from the water, and for another it's the only way he has of getting a living, poor man—unless he's gone to sea again, which isn't likely."

"Coasting trade, I suppose?" said the skipper, glancing at two or three small craft which were floating in oil round the walls.

The old lady nodded. "Those were his ships," she said,

following his glance; "but the painters never could get the clouds to please him. I shouldn't think there was a man in all England harder to please with clouds than he was."

"What sort of looking man is he?" inquired Wilson.

"I'll get you a portrait," said the old lady, and she rose and left the room.

The girl from her seat in the window by the geraniums stitched on steadily. The skipper, anxious to appear at his ease, coughed gently three times, and was on the very verge of a remark—about the weather—when she turned her head and became absorbed in something outside. The skipper fell to regarding the clouds again with even more disfavour than the missing captain himself could have shown.

"That was taken just before he disappeared," said the old lady, entering the room again and handing him a photograph. "You can keep that."

The skipper took it and gazed intently at the likeness of a sturdy full-bearded man of about sixty. Then he placed it carefully in his breast-pocket and rose to his feet.

"And if I should happen to drop across him," he said slowly, "what might his name be?"

"Gething," said the old lady, "Captain Gething. If you should see him, and would tell him that he has nothing to fear, and that his wife and his daughter Annis are dying to see him, you will have done what I can never, never properly thank you for."

"I'll do my best," said the other warmly. "Good afternoon."

He shook hands with the old woman, and then, standing with his hands by his side, looked doubtfully at Annis.

"Good afternoon," she said cheerfully.

Mrs. Gething showed him to the door.

"Any time you are at Gravesend, captain, we shall be pleased to see you and hear how you get on," she said as she let him out.

The captain thanked her, pausing at the gate to glance covertly at the window; but the girl was bending over her work again, and he walked away rapidly.

Until he had reached his ship and was sitting down to his belated dinner he had almost forgotten, in the joyful excitement of having something to do for Miss Gething, the fact that she was engaged to another man. As he remembered this he pushed his plate from him, and, leaning his head on his hand, gave way to a fit of deep melancholy. He took the photograph from his pocket, and, gazing at it intently, tried to discover a likeness between the father and daughter. There was not sufficient to warrant him in bestowing a chaste salute upon it.

"What do you think o' that?" he inquired, handing it over to the mate, who had been watching him curiously.

"Any friend o' yours?" inquired the mate, cautiously.

"No," said the other.

"Well, I don't think much of him," said the mate. "Where d'you get it?"

"It was given to me," said the skipper. "He's missing, and I've got to find him if I can. You might as well keep your eyes open too."

"Where are you going to look for him?" asked the mate.

"Everywhere," said the other. "I'm told that he's likely to be in a seaport town, and if you'll be on the look-out I'll take it as a favour."

"I'll do that, o' course," said the mate. "What's he been doing?"

"Nothing that I know of," said the skipper; "but he's been missing some five years, and I promised I'd do my best to find him."

"Friends are anxious, I s'pose?" said the mate.

"Yes," said the other.

"I always find," continued the mate, "that women are more anxious in these sort o' cases than men."

"More tender-hearted," said the skipper.

"It ain't a bad sort o' face, now I come to look at it," said the baffled mate, regarding it closely. "Seems to me I've seen somebody very much like it—a girl, I think—but I can't say where."

"Bearded lady at a fair, I should think," said the skipper bluffly.

Conversation was interrupted by the appearance of Henry, who, seeing the photograph in the mate's hand, at once began putting the butter away. A glance told him that the mate was holding it upside down, and conscience told him that this was for his benefit. He therefore rigidly averted his gaze while clearing the table, and in a small mental ledger, which he kept with scrupulous care for items such as these, made a debit entry in the mate's account.

"Boy," said the skipper suddenly.

"Sir," said Henry.

"You're a fairly sharp youngster, I think," said the skipper. "Take hold o' that photo there."

Henry's face suffused with a great joy. He looked derisively at the mate and took the photograph from him, listening intently to much the same instructions as had been previously given to the mate. "And you can take it for'ard," concluded the skipper, "and let the men see it."

"The men?" said Henry in astonishment.

"Yes, the men; don't I speak plain?" retorted the skipper.

"Very plain, sir," said the boy; "but they'll only make a muddle of it, sir. Fancy fat Sam and the cook, and Dick!"

"Do as you're told?" said the other irascibly.

"O' course, sir," said Henry, "but they'll only worry me with a lot o' questions as to who 'e is an' wot you want 'im for."

"You take it for'ard," said the skipper, "and tell them there's a couple of sovereigns for the first man that finds him."

The youth took the photograph, and after another careful scrutiny, with the object of getting a start in the race for wealth, took it forward. Fat Sam, it seemed, had seen the very man only two days before at Poplar; the cook knew his features as well as he knew those of his own mother, while Dick had known him for years as an old and respected inhabitant of Plymouth. Henry went back to the skipper, and, having furnished him with this information, meekly suggested that they should drag Gravesend first.

It was midnight when they got the anchor up and dropped silently down the river. Gravesend was silent, and the dotted lines of street lamps shone over a sleeping town as the *Seamew* crept softly by. A big steamer in front whistled warningly for the pilot's boat, and slowing up as the small craft shot out from the shore to meet it, caused a timely diversion to the skipper's melancholy by lying across his bows. By the time he had fully recovered from the outrage and had drunk a cup of coffee, which had been prepared in the galley, Gravesend had disappeared round the bend, and his voluntary search had commenced.

CHAPTER III

THEY made Brittlesea in four days—days in which the skipper, a prey to gentle melancholy, left things mostly to the mate. Whereupon melancholia became contagious, and Sam's concertina having been impounded by the energetic mate, disaffection reared its ugly head in the foc'sle and called him improper names when he was out of earshot.

They entered the small river on which stands the ancient town of Brittlesea at nightfall. Business for the day was over. A few fishermen, pipe in mouth, lounged upon the quay, while sounds of revelry, which in some mysterious way reminded the crew of their mission to find Captain Gething, proceeded from the open doors of a small tavern opposite. The most sanguine of them hardly expected to find him the first time; but, as Sam said, the sooner they started the better. For all they knew he might be sitting in that very public-house waiting to be found.

They went ashore a little later and looked for him there, but without success. All they did find was a rather hot-tempered old man, who, irritated by the searching scrutiny of the cook, asked him shortly whether he had lost anything, because, if so, and he, the cook, thought he was sitting on it, perhaps he'd be good enough to say so. The cook having replied in fitting terms, they moved off down the quay to the next tavern. Here they fared no better, Dick declaring that the beer was if anything worse than the other, and that nobody who had lived in the place any time would spend his money there. They therefore moved on once more, and closing time came before their labours were half completed.

"It's quite a little romans," said Sam thickly, as he was pushed outside the last house of call, and a bolt shot desolately behind him. "Where shall we go now?"

"Get back to the ship," said Dick; "come along."

"Not 'fore I foun' 'im," said Sam solemnly, as he drew back from Dick's detaining hand.

"You won't find him to-night, Sam," said the cook humorsomely.

"Why not?" said Sam, regarding him with glassy eyes. "We came out fin' 'im!"

"Cos it's dark, for one thing," said the cook.

Sam laughed scornfully.

"Come on!" said Dick, catching him by the arm again.

"I come out fin' cap'n, cap'n—fin' 'im," said Sam. "I'm not goin' back 'thout 'im."

He rolled off down the road, and the two men, the simple traditions of whose lives forbade them to leave a shipmate when in that condition, followed him, growling. For half an hour they walked with him through the silent streets of the little town, Dick with difficulty repressing his impatience as the stout seaman bent down at intervals and thoroughly searched doorsteps and other likely places for the missing man. Finally, he stopped in front of a small house, walked on a little way, came back, and then, as though he had suddenly made up his mind, walked towards it.

"Hold him, cook!" shouted Dick, throwing his arms around him.

The cook flung his arms round Sam's neck, and the two men, panting fiercely, dragged him away.

"Now you come aboard, you old fool!" said Dick, losing his temper; "we've had enough of your games."

"Leg go!" said Sam, struggling.

"You leave that knocker alone, then," said Dick warningly.

"'E's in there!" said Sam, nodding wisely at the house.

"You come back, you old fool!" repeated Dick. "You never 'ort to 'ave nothin' stronger than milk."

"'Ole my coat, cookie!" said Sam, his manner changing suddenly to an alarming sternness.

"Don't be a fool, Sam!" said the cook entreatingly.

"'Ole my coat!" repeated Sam, eyeing him haughtily.

"You *know* you haven't got a coat on," said the cook appealingly. "Can't you see it's a jersey? You ain't so far gone as all that."

"Well, 'ole me while I take it off," said Sam sensibly.

Against his better sense the cook steadied the stout seaman while he proceeded to peel. Dick waited until the garment—a very tight one—was over his head, and then, pushing the cook aside, took his victim and made him slowly gyrate on the pavement.

"Turn round three times and catch who you can, Sam," he said cruelly. "Well, sit down, then."

He lowered him to the pavement, and, accompanied by the cook, drew off and left him to his fate. Their last glance showed them a stout able-bodied seaman, with his head and arms confined in a jersey, going through contortions of an extraordinary nature to free himself, and indulging in language which, even when filtered by the garment in question, was of a singularly comprehensive and powerful description. He freed himself at last, and after flinging the garment away in his anger, picked it up again, and carrying it under his arm, zigzagged his way back to the ship.

His memory when he awoke next morning was not quite clear, but a hazy recollection of having been insulted led him to treat Dick and the cook with marked coldness, which did not wear off until they were all busy on deck. Working at cement is a dry job, and, after hardening his heart for some time, the stout seaman allowed the cook to call him to the galley and present him with a mug of cold coffee left from the cabin table.

The cook washed the mug up, and, preferring the dusty deck to the heat of the fire, sat down to wash a bowl of potatoes. It was a task which lent itself to meditation, and his thoughts, as he looked wistfully at the shore, reverted to Captain Gething and the best means of finding him. It was clear that the photograph was an important factor in the search, and, possessed with a new idea, he left the potatoes and went down to the cabin in search of it. He found it on a shelf in the skipper's state-room, and, passing up on deck again, stepped ashore.

From the first three people he spoke to he obtained no information whatever. They all inspected the photograph curiously and indulged in comments, mostly unfavourable, but all agreed that there was nobody like it in Brittlesea. He had almost given it up as a bad job, and was about to return, when he saw an aged fisherman reclining against a post.

"Fine day, mate," said the cook.

The old man courteously removed a short clay pipe from his puckered mouth in order to nod, and replacing it, resumed his glance seaward.

"Ever seen anybody like that?" inquired the cook, producing the portrait.

The old man patiently removed the pipe again, and taking the portrait, scanned it narrowly.

"It's wonderful how they get these things up nowadays," he said in a quavering voice; "there was nothing like that when you an' me was boys."

"There 'as been improvements," admitted the cook indignantly.

"All oils they was," continued the old man meditatively, "or crains."

"'Ave you ever seen anybody like that?" demanded the cook impatiently.

"Why, o' course I have. I'm going to tell you in a minute," said the old man querulously. "Let me see—what's his name again?"

"I don't know 'is name," said the cook untruthfully.

"I should know it if I was to hear it," said the old man slowly. "Ah, I've got it! I've got it!"

He tapped his head triumphantly, and with a bleared, shining old eye, winked at the cook.

"My memory's as good as ever it was," he said complacently. "Sometimes I forget things, but they come back. My mother used to be the same, and she lived to ninety-three."

"Lor!" interrupted the anxious cook. "What's the name?"

The old man stopped. "Drat it!" he said, with a worried look, "I've lost it again; but it'll come back."

The cook waited ten minutes for the prodigal. "It ain't nothing, I s'pose?" he said at length.

"No," said the old man; "don't you be in a hurry; it'll come back."

"When?" asked the cook rebelliously.

"It might be in five minutes' time, and it might be in a month," said the old man firmly, "but it'll come back."

He took the portrait from the hands of the now sulky cook and strove to jog his memory with it.

"John Dunn's his name," he cried suddenly. "John Dunn."

"Where does 'e live?" inquired the cook eagerly.

"Holebourne," said the old man—"a little place seven miles off the road."

"Are you sure it's the same," asked the cook in a trembling voice.

"Sartain," said the other firmly. "He come here first about six years ago, an' then he quarrelled with his landlord and went off to Holebourne."

The cook, with a flushed face, glanced along the quay to the schooner. Work was still proceeding amid a cloud of white dust, and so far his absence appeared to have passed unnoticed.

"If they want any dinner," he muttered, alluding to the powdered figures at work on the schooner, "they must get it for theirselves, that's all. Will you come and 'ave a drop, old man?"

The old man, nothing loath, assented, and having tasted of the cook's bounty, crawled beside him through the little town to put him on the road to Holebourne, and after seeing him safe, returned to his beloved post.

The cook went along, whistling, thinking pleasantly of the discomfiture of the other members of the crew when they should discover his luck. For three miles he kept on sturdily, until a small signboard, projecting from between a couple of tall elms, attracted his attention to a little inn just off the road, at the porch of which a stout landlord sat on a wooden stool waiting for custom.

The cook hesitated a moment, and then marching slowly up, took a stool which stood opposite and ordered a pint.

The landlord rose in a heavy, leisurely fashion, entered the house to execute the order, and returned carefully bearing a foaming mug.

"Take the top off," said the cook courteously.

The stout man, with a nod towards him, complied.

"'Ave a pint with me," said the cook, after a hasty glance into the interior, as the landlord handed him the mug. "You keep that one," he added.

The stout man drew another pint, and subsiding on to his stool with a little sigh, disposed himself for conversation.

"Taking a country walk?" he inquired.

The cook nodded. "Not all pleasure," he said importantly; "I'm on business."

"Ah, it's you fellows what make all the money," said the landlord. "I've only drawn these two pints this morning. Going far?"

"Holebourne," said the other.

"Know anybody there?" asked the landlord.

"Well, not exactly," said the cook; "I can't say as I know 'im. I'm after a party o' the name o' Dunn."

"You won't get much out of him," said the landlady, who had just joined them. "He's a close un, he is."

The cook closed his eyes and smiled knowingly.

"There's a mystery about that man," said the landlady.

Nobody knows who he is or what he is, and he won't tell
n. When a man's like that you generally know there's
mething wrong—leastways I do."

"Insulting, he is," said the landlord.

"Ah," said the cook, "'e won't insult me!"

"You know something about him?" said the landlady.

"A little," said the cook.

The landlord reached over to his wife, who bent her ear
adily and dutifully towards him, and the cook distinctly
ught the whispered word "'tec."

The landlady, after a curious glance at the cook, withdrew
serve a couple of waggoners who had drawn up at the door.
nversation became general, and it was evident that the
ggoners shared the sentiments of the landlord and his wife
th regard to Mr. Dunn. They regarded the cook with awe,
d after proffering him a pint with respectful timidity, offered
give him a lift to Holebourne.

"I'd sooner go on my own," said the cook, with a glance
the waggons; "I want to get in the place quiet like and
e a look round before I do anythin'."

He sat there for some time resting, and evading as best he
uld the skilful questions of the landlady. The waggons
ved off first, jolting and creaking their way to Holebourne,
d the cook, after making a modest luncheon of bread and
eese and smoking a pipe, got on the road again.

"Look how he walks!" said the landlord, as the couple
tched him up the road.

"Ah!" said his wife.

"Like a bloodhound," said the landlord impressively;
ust watch him. I knew what he was directly I clapped eyes
him."

The cook continued his journey, unconscious of the
miration excited by his movements. He began to think
at he had been a trifle foolish in talking so freely. Still, he
d not said much, and if people liked to make mistakes, why,
at was their business.

In this frame of mind he entered Holebourne, a small
lage consisting of a little street, an inn, and a church. At
e end of the street, in front of a tidy little cottage with a
ll-kept front garden, a small knot of people were talking.

"Somethin' on," said the cook to himself as he returned
h interest the stares of the villagers. "Which is
. Dunn's house, boy?"

"There it is, sir," said the boy, pointing to the house
ere the people were standing. "Are you the detective?"

"No," said the cook sharply.

He walked across to the house and opened the little
den gate, quite a little hum of excitement following him as

he walked up to the door and knocked upon it with his knuckles.

"Come in," growled a deep voice.

The cook entered and carefully closed the door behind him. He found himself in a small sitting-room, the only occupant of which was an old man of forbidding aspect sitting in an easy chair with a newspaper open in his hand.

"What do you want?" he demanded, looking up.

"I want to see Mr. Dunn," said the cook nervously.

"I'm Mr. Dunn," said the other, waiting.

The cook's heart sank, for, with the exception of a beard, Mr. Dunn no more resembled the portrait than he did.

"I'm Mr. Dunn," repeated the old man, regarding him ferociously from beneath his shaggy eyebrows.

The cook smiled, but faintly. He tried to think, but the old man's gaze sent all the ideas out of his head.

"Oh, are you?" he said at length.

"I heard you were looking for me," said the old man, gradually raising his voice to a roar. "All the village knows it, I think, and now you've found me what the devil is it you want?"

"I—I think there's a mistake," stammered the cook.

"Oh," said the old man. "Ha! is there? Pretty detective you are. I'll bring an action against you. I'll have you imprisoned and dismissed the force."

"It's all a mistake," said the cook; "I'm not a detective."

"Come this way," said the old man, rising.

The cook followed him into a smaller room at the back.

"You're not a detective?" said the old man, as he motioned him to a seat. "I suppose you know that impersonating a detective is a serious offence? Just stay here while I fetch a policeman, will you?"

The cook said he wouldn't.

"Ah," said the old man with a savage grin," "I think you will." Then he went to the door and called loudly for "Roger."

Before the dazed cook of the *Seamew* could collect his scattered senses a pattering sounded on the stairs, and a bull-dog came unobtrusively into the room. It was a perfectly bred animal, with at least a dozen points about it calling for notice and admiration, but all that the cook noticed was the excellent preservation of its teeth.

"Watch him, Roger," said the old man, taking a hat from a sideboard. "Don't let him move."

The animal growled intelligently, and sitting down a yard or two in front of the cook watched him with much interest.

"I'm sure I'm very sorry," muttered the cook. "Don't go away and leave me with this dog, sir."

"He won't touch you unless you move," said the old man.

The cook's head swam; he felt vaguely round for a subtle compliment. "I'd rather you stayed," he quavered, "I would indeed. I don't know any man I've took a greater fancy to at first sight."

"I don't want any of your confounded insolence," said the other sternly. "Watch him, Roger."

Roger growled with all the cheerfulness of a dog who had found a job which suited him, and his owner, after again warning the cook of what would happen if he moved out of the chair, left the room, shutting the door as he went. The cook heard the front door close behind him, and then all was silence, except for the strong breathing of Roger.

For some time the man and dog sat eyeing each other in silence, then the former, moistening his dry lips with his tongue, gave a conciliatory chirrup. Roger responded with a deep growl, and, rising to his feet, yawned expressively.

"Poor Roger!" said the cook in trembling accents, "poor old Rogy-wogy! Good old dog!"

The good old dog came a little nearer and closely inspected the cook's legs, which were knocking together with fright.

"Cats!" said the Cook, pointing to the door as an idea occurred to him. "S-cat! Seize 'em, dog! seize 'em!"

"G-w-r-r," said Roger menacingly. The quivering limbs had a strange fascination for him, and coming closer he sniffed at them loudly.

In a perfect panic the cook, after glancing helplessly at the poker, put his hand gently behind him and drew his sheath-knife. Then, with a courage born of fear, he struck the dog suddenly in the body, and before it could recover from the suddenness of the attack, withdrew his knife and plunged it in again. The dog gave a choking growl and, game to the last, made a grab at the cook's leg, and missing it, rolled over on the floor, giving a faint kick or two as the breath left its body.

It had all happened so quickly that the cook, mechanically wiping his blade on the tablecloth, hardly realized the foulness of the crime of which he had been guilty, but felt inclined to congratulate himself upon his desperate bravery. Then as he realized that, in addition to the offence for which the choleric Mr. Dunn was even now seeking the aid of the law, there was a dead bulldog and a spoiled carpet to answer for, he resolved upon an immediate departure. He made his way to the back door, and sheathing his knife, crept stealthily down the garden, and clambered over the fence at the bottom. Then, with his back to the scene of the murder, he put up his hands and ran.

He crossed two fields and got on to a road, his breath coming painfully as he toiled along with an occasional glance behind him. It was uphill, but he kept on until he had gained the top, and then he threw himself down panting by the side of the road with his face turned in the direction of Holebourne. Five minutes later he started up again and resumed his flight, as several figures burst into the road from the village in hot pursuit.

For a little while he kept to the road, then, as the idea occurred to him that some of his pursuers might use a vehicle, he broke through the hedge and took to the fields. His legs gave way beneath him, and he stumbled rather than ran, but he kept on alternately walking and running until all signs of the pursuit had ceased.

CHAPTER IV

SAFE for the time being, but with the memory of his offences pursuing him, the cook first washed his face and hands in a trough, and next removed the stains of the crime from his knife. He then pushed on again rapidly until he struck another road, and begging a lift from a passing waggon, lay full length on top of a load of straw and nervously scanned the landscape as they travelled. Half a dozen miles farther on the waggon halted before a comfortable farmhouse, and the cook, after bestowing on the carter two of the few coins left him, went his way, losing himself, with a view to baffling pursuit, among a maze of small lanes, turning right or left as the fancy took him, until nightfall found him tired and famished on the outskirts of a small village.

Conscious of the power of the telegraph, which he had no doubt was interesting itself in his behalf over the surrounding districts, he skulked behind a hedge until the lights went from the ground floor to the first floor of the cottages and then went out altogether. He then, with the utmost caution, looked round in search of shelter. He came at last to two cottages standing by themselves about half a mile beyond the village, one of which had a wooden shed in the garden which seemed to offer the very shelter he required. Satisfied that the inmates of the cottage were all abed he entered the garden, and, treading on tiptoe, walked towards the shed, fumbled at the hasp and opened the door. It was pitch dark within and silent, till something rustled uneasily. There was a note of alarm and indignation. The cook tripped on a stone, and only saved himself from falling by clutching at a perch which a dozen fowls instantly vacated with loud and frenzied appeals for assistance. Immediately the shed

was full of flapping wings and agitated hens darting wildly between his legs as he made for the door again, only to run into the arms of a man who came from the cottage.

"I've got him, Poll!" shouted the latter, as he dealt the cook a blow with a stick. "I've got him!"

He fetched him another blow and was preparing for a third, when the cook, maddened with the pain, struck at him wildly and sent him sprawling. He was up again in an instant and, aided by his wife, who had stopped to make a slight concession to appearances in the shape of a flannel petticoat, threw the cook down and knelt on him. A man came out from the adjoining cottage, and having, with great presence of mind, first found a vacant spot on the cook and knelt on it, asked what was the matter.

"After my hens," said the first man breathlessly. "I just heard 'em in time."

"I wasn't after your hens. I didn't know they was there!" gasped the cook.

"Lock him up!" said the second man warmly.

"I'm goin' to," said the other. "Keep still, you thief!"

"Get up!" said the cook faintly; "you're killin' me."

"Take him in the house and tie him up for the night, and we'll take him to Winton police station in the morning," said the neighbour. "He's a desperate character."

As they declined to trust the cook to walk, he was carried into the kitchen, where the woman, leaving him for a moment, struck a match and hastily lit a candle. She then opened a drawer and, to the cook's horror, began pulling out about twenty fathoms of clothes-line.

"The best way and the safest is to tie him in a chair," said the neighbour. "I remember my gran'father used to tell a tale of how they served a highwayman that way once."

"That would be best, I think," said the woman, pondering. "He'd be more comfortable in a chair, though I'm sure he don't deserve it."

They raised the exhausted cook, and placing him in a stout oak chair, lashed him to it until he could scarcely breathe.

"After my gran'father had tied the highwayman in the chair, he gave him a crack on the head with a stick," said the neighbour, regarding the cook thoughtfully.

"They was very brutal in those times," said the cook, before anybody else could speak.

"Just to keep him quiet like," said the neighbour, somewhat chilled by the silence of the other two.

"I think he'll do as he is," said the owner of the fowls, carefully feeling the prisoner's bonds. "If you'll come in in the morning, Pettit, we'll borrow a cart an' take him over to Winton. I expect there's a lot of things against him."

"I expect there is," said Pettit, as the cook shuddered. "Well, good-night."

He returned to his house, and the couple, after carefully inspecting the cook again, and warning him of the consequences if he moved, blew out the candle and returned to their interrupted slumbers.

For a long time the unfortunate cook sat in a state of dreary apathy, wondering vaguely at the ease with which he had passed from crime to crime, and trying to estimate how much he should get for each. A cricket sang from the hearthstone, and a mouse squeaked upon the floor. Worn out with fatigue and trouble, he at length fell asleep.

He awoke suddenly and tried to leap out of his bunk on to the floor and hop on one leg as a specific for the cramp. Then, as he realised his position, he strove madly to rise and straighten the afflicted limb. He was so far successful that he managed to stand, and in the fantastic appearance of a human snail, to shuffle slowly round the kitchen. At first he thought only of the cramp, but after that had yielded to treatment a wild idea of escape occurred to him. Still bowed with the chair, he made his way to the door, and, after two or three attempts, got the latch in his mouth and opened it. Within five minutes he had shuffled his way through the garden gate, which was fortunately open, and reached the road.

The exertion was so laborious that he sat down again upon his portable seat and reckoned up his chances. Fear lent him wings, though of a very elementary type, and as soon as he judged he was out of earshot he backed up against a tree and vigorously banged the chair against it.

He shed one cracked hind leg in this way, and the next time he sat down had to perform feats of balancing not unworthy of Blondin himself.

Until day broke did this persecuted man toil painfully along with the chair, and the sun rose and found him sitting carefully in the middle of the road, faintly anathematising Captain Gething and everything connected with him. He was startled by the sound of footsteps rapidly approaching him, and, being unable to turn his head, he rose painfully to his feet and faced about bodily.

The new-comer stopped abruptly, and, gazing in astonishment at the extraordinary combination of man and chair before him, retired a few paces in disorder. At a little distance he had mistaken the cook for a lover of nature, communing with it at his ease; now he was undecided whether it was a monstrosity or an apparition.

"Mornin', mate," said the cook in a weary voice.

"Morning," said the man, backing still more.

"I s'pose," said the cook, trying to smile cheerfully, "you're surprised to see me like this?"

"I've never seen anything like it afore," said the man guardedly.

"I don't s'pose you 'ave," said the cook. "I'm the only man in England that can do it."

The man said he could quite believe it.

"I'm doin' it for a bet," said the cook.

"Oh-h," said the man, his countenance clearing, "a bet. I thought you were mad. How much is it?"

"Fifty pounds," said the cook. "I've come all the way from London like this."

"Well, I'm blest!" said the man. "What won't they think of next! Got much farther to go?"

"Oakville," said the cook, mentioning a place he had heard of in his wanderings. "At least I was, but I find it's too much for me. Would you mind doing me the favour of cutting this line?"

"No, no," said the other reproachfully, "don't give up now. Why, it's only another seventeen miles."

"I must give it up," said the cook, with a sad smile.

"Don't be beat," said the man warmly. "Keep your 'art up, and you'll be as pleased as Punch presently to think how near you was losing."

"Cut it off," said the cook, trembling with impatience; "I've earned forty pounds of it by coming so far. If you cut it off I'll send you ten of it."

The man hesitated while an inborn love of sport struggled with his greed.

"I've got a wife and family," he said at last in extenuation, and taking out a clasp-knife, steadied the cook with one hand while he severed his bonds with the other.

"God bless you, mate!" said the cook, trying to straighten his bowed back as the chair fell to the ground.

"My name's Jack Thompson," said his benefactor. "Jack Thompson, Winchgate, 'll find me."

"I'll make it twelve pounds," said the grateful cook, "and you can have the chair."

He shook him by the hand, and, freed from his burden, stepped out on his return journey, while his innocent accomplice, shouldering the chair, went back to learn from the rightful owner a few hard truths about his mental capacity.

Not knowing how much start he would have, the cook, despite his hunger and fatigue, pushed on with all the speed of which he was capable. After an hour's journey he ventured to ask the direction of an embryo ploughman, and wheedled out of him a small, a very small, portion of his breakfast.

From the top of the next hill he caught a glimpse of the sea, and taking care to keep this friend of his youth in sight, felt his way along by it to Brittlesea. At midday he begged some broken victuals from a gamekeeper's cottage, and with renewed vigour resumed his journey, and at ten o'clock that night staggered on to Brittlesea quay and made his way cautiously to the ship. There was nobody on deck, but a light burnt in the foc'sle, and after a careful peep below he descended. Henry, who was playing a losing game of draughts with Sam, looked up with a start, and overturned the board.

"Lord love us, cookie!" said Sam, "where 'ave you been?"

The cook straightened up, smiling faintly, and gave a wave of his hand which took in all the points of the compass. "Everywhere," he said wearily.

"You've been on the spree," said Sam, regarding him severely.

"*Spree!*" said the cook with expression. "*Spree!*"

His feelings choked him, and after a feeble attempt to translate them into words, he abandoned the attempt, and turning a deaf ear to Sam's appeals for information, rolled into his bunk and fell fast asleep.

CHAPTER V

THEY got under way at four o'clock next morning, and woke the cook up to assist at 3.30. At 3.45 they woke him again, and at 3.50 dragged him from his bunk and tried to arouse him to a sense of his duties. The cook, with his eyes still closed, crawled back again the moment they left him, and though they had him out twice after that, he went back in the same somnambulistic state and resumed his slumbers.

Brittlesea was thirty miles astern when he at length awoke and went on deck, and the schooner was scudding along under a stiff breeze. It was a breeze such as the mate loved, and his face was serene and peaceful until his gaze fell upon the shrinking figure of the cook as it glided softly into the galley.

"Cook," he roared, "come here, you skulking rascal! Where've you been all this time?"

"I've been in trouble, sir," said the cook humbly; "you'll 'ardly believe the trouble I've been in through trying to do the skipper a kindness."

"Don't you come none of that with me," roared the mate warningly. "Where've you been? Come, out with it!"

The cook, still somewhat weak from his adventures, leaned against the companion, and with much dramatic gesture began his story. As it proceeded the mate's breath came thick and fast, his colour rose, and he became erratic in his steering. Flattered by these symptoms of concern, the cook continued.

"That'll do," said the mate at last.

"I ain't got to the worst of it yet, sir," said the cook.

"If you stand there lying to me for another moment I'll break your neck," said the mate violently. "You've had two days on the drink, that's what you've had."

"It's gawspel truth, sir," said the cook solemnly.

"You wait till the skipper turns out," said the other, shaking his fist at him. "If it wasn't for leaving the wheel I'd set about you myself, my lad."

To the cook's indignation the skipper shared the opinions of the mate concerning his story, and in a most abrupt and unfeeling fashion stopped two days' pay. Down in the foc'sle he fared no better, the crew's honest tribute of amazement to his powers of untruthful narrative passing all bounds of decorum.

Their incredulity was a source of great grief to him. He had pictured himself posing as a daredevil, and he went about his duties with a chastened mien, mistaken by the men, experts in such matters, for the reaction after a drinking bout.

They passed Northfleet on their way up to Rotherhithe, where they went to discharge a small general cargo, the cook's behaviour every time a police-boat passed them coming in for much scornful censure. It was some hours before he would go ashore and, when at last he did venture, it was with the reckless air of Robert Macaire and a Dick Turpin rolled into one.

It was a damp, cheerless morning when they got to Northfleet again. It had been raining heavily in the night, and black clouds still hung low over the river. They were not to load until the next day, and after dinner Henry and the mate exchanged a sympathetic smile as the skipper took up his cap and went ashore.

He walked into Gravesend, and taking no notice of the rain, which was falling steadily, strolled idly about looking into the shop windows. He had a romantic idea that he might meet Annis Gething there. It was half-holiday at the school, and it was the most natural thing in the world that she should be sauntering about Gravesend in the pouring rain. At about four o'clock, being fairly wet through, he saw the fallacy of the idea strongly, and in a disconsolate fashion, after one glass at a convenient tavern, turned to go back to the ship. A little way along the road he stepped aside to allow a

girl to pass, glancing—by mere force of habit—beneath her umbrella as he did so. Then he started back guiltily as his eyes met those of Miss Gething. She half stopped.

"Good afternoon," said the skipper awkwardly.

"Good afternoon," said she.

"Nasty weather," said the skipper, standing respectfully three yards off.

"Wretched," said Miss Gething. "Ugh!"

"I don't mind it much myself," said the skipper.

"You must be very wet," said Miss Gething. "You are going to see mother, I suppose?"

"I did think of doing so," said the skipper with joyous untruthfulness.

"I'm going to do a little shopping," said she. "Good-bye."

She nodded brightly, and the skipper, raising his cap, turned on his heel and set off to pay the call. He turned his head several times as he went, but Miss Gething, who knew more of men than the skipper knew of women, did not turn hers.

A quarter of an hour's brisk walk brought him to the house, and he shook the rain from his cap as he knocked gently at the door. It was opened by a man, who, standing with his hand on the lock regarded him inquiringly.

"Mrs. Gething in?" asked the skipper.

"No, she's not just at present," said the other.

"I'll come in and wait for her if you don't mind," said the skipper, speaking on the spur of the moment.

The other hesitated, and then standing aside to allow him to pass, closed the door, and they entered the small parlour together. The skipper, with a courage which surprised himself, took a chair uninvited and began to wipe his trousers with his handkerchief.

"I'm afraid Mrs. Gething will be a long time," said the other man at last.

"I'll give her a few minutes," said the skipper, who would have sat there a week with pleasure.

He rubbed his moustache and beard with his handkerchief and put them into shape with his fingers. The other man regarded these operations with an unfavourable eye, and watched him uneasily.

"No message you could leave for Mrs. Gething," he suggested, after a quarter of an hour.

The skipper shook his head, and in his turn took stock of the other man—a good-looking fellow with a waxed black moustache, a light silk tie and a massive scarf-pin. A frock-coat hung about his knees, and shoes of the lightest brown called attention to his small feet.

Another quarter of an hour passed. "Wet day," said the skipper, by way of starting the conversation again.

The other assented, and remarked that he thought it very probable that the wet would prevent Mrs. Gething from returning, whereupon conversation languished until the sound of hurried footsteps outside, and a turning of a key in the latch, made them both look up.

"Here she is," said the skipper softly.

The other man said nothing, feeling possibly that the entrance of Miss Gething was sufficient refutation of the statement. He was also in anything but a talkative mood.

"Mother not in?" said Miss Gething in surprise as she entered the room. "How good of you to wait, captain."

"Oh, it's no trouble," said the skipper, who really thought that there was no credit due to him for his action.

She shook hands with the other man and smiled at the skipper. "I've seen you before," she said, "and it is good of you to wait. I'm sure you're very wet. This is Mr. Glover, Captain Wilson."

The two gentlemen glared their acknowledgments, and the skipper, with a sinking at his heart, began to feel in the way. Miss Gething, after going outside to remove her hat and jacket, came in smiling pleasantly, and conversation became general, the two men using her as a sort of human telephone through which to transmit scanty ideas.

"Half-past five," said Miss Gething suddenly. "Have you got to catch the 6.30 train, Mr. Glover?"

"Must," said Mr. Glover dismally. "Business, you know," he added resignedly.

"You'll take a cup of tea before you go?" said Annis.

She was standing before Mr. Glover as she spoke, and the skipper, who had been feeling more and more in the way, rose and murmured that he must go. His amazement when Miss Gething twisted her pretty face into a warning scowl and shook her head at him, was so great that Mr. Glover turned suddenly to see the cause of it.

"You'll take a cup, too, captain?" said Miss Gething with a polite smile.

"Thank you," said the skipper, resuming his seat. His ideas were in a whirl, and he sat silent as the girl deftly set the tea-table and took her seat before the tray.

"Quite a tea-party," she said brightly. "One piece of sugar, Mr. Glover?"

"Two," said that gentleman in an injured voice.

She looked inquiringly at the skipper with the sugar-tongs poised.

"I'll leave it to you," said he confusedly. Mr. Glover smiled contemptuously, and raised his eyebrows a little. Miss Gething dropped in one piece and handed him the cup.

"Sometimes I take one piece, sometimes two or three,"

said the skipper, trying to explain away his foolishness. "I'm not particular."

"You must be of an easy-going nature," said Miss Gething indulgently.

"Don't know his own mind, I should think," said Mr. Glover rudely.

"I know it about other things," said the skipper.

The tone in which this remark was made set Mr. Glover wondering darkly what the other things were. Neither man was disposed to be talkative, and tea would have proceeded in sombre silence but for the hostess. At ten minutes past six Mr. Glover rose and with great unwillingness said he must go.

"It isn't raining much now," said Miss Gething encouragingly. Mr. Glover went to the hall, and taking his hat and umbrella, shook hands with her. Then he came to the door again, and looked at the skipper. "Going my way?" he inquired with great affability, considering.

"Er—no," said the other.

Mr. Glover put on his hat with a bang, and with a curt nod followed Miss Gething to the door and departed.

"I think he'll catch the train all right," said the skipper, as Miss Gething watched his feverish haste from the window.

"I hope so," said she.

"I'm sorry your mother wasn't in," said the skipper, breaking a long pause.

"Yes, it has been dull for you, I'm afraid," said the girl.

The skipper sighed wearily and wondered whether Mr. Glover was such an adept at silly remarks as he appeared to be.

"Has he got far to go?" he inquired, referring to Mr. Glover.

"London," said Annis briefly.

She stood at the window for some time, gazing up the road with what appeared to be an expression of anxious solicitude.

"Well, I suppose I must be going," said the skipper, who thought he ought not to stay any longer.

Annis stood aside as he rose, and followed him slowly to the hall.

"I wish we had an umbrella to lend you," she said, looking round.

"Oh, that'll be all right," said the skipper. "I'm nearly dry now."

"Dry?" said Annis. She put her little hand on his coat-sleeve.

"Oh, you're soaking," she said in dismay. "The idea of me letting you sit about in that state!"

"That sleeve is the worst," said the skipper, whom circumstances had made artful. "It's all right here."

He brushed his hand down his coat.

"That's a good thing," said Annis politely.

"Um, but not here," said the skipper, squeezing the lapel of his coat.

Annis touched his coat lightly.

"You're very wet," she said severely; "you ought not to sit about in such things. Wait a moment. I'll get you a great-coat of my father's."

She sped lightly up the stairs, and returning with a long, heavy coat, held it out to him.

"That'll keep you dry," she remarked as the skipper, after a few slight remonstrances, began to put it on. She held the other sleeve up for him and watched, with the satisfaction of a philanthropist, as he buttoned it up. Then she opened the door.

"You'll give my respects to Mrs. Gething?" said the skipper.

"Certainly. She'll be sorry she wasn't in. Are you staying here long?"

"About three days."

Annis pondered.

"She's going out to-morrow," she said tentatively.

"I shall be in the town the day after on business," said the skipper. "If it wouldn't be troubling you I might look in. Good-bye."

He shook hands confusedly, wondering whether he had gone too far; and, as the door closed behind him, put his hands into Captain Gething's pockets and went off in a brown study. Slowly and distinctly as he went along the various things grouped themselves together in his mind, and he began to think aloud.

"She knew her mother was out when she met me," he said slowly. "She knew that other fellow was here; but one would have thought—— Lovers' tiff," he said suddenly and bitterly; "and doing the pleasant to me to make him smart a bit. He'll be round to-morrow when the mother's out."

He went back dejectedly to his ship, and countermanding the tea with which the zealous Henry was about to indulge him, changed his clothes and sat down to smoke.

"You've got a bit wet," said the mate. "Where'd you get the coat?"

"Friend," said the other. "Had it lent to me. You know that Captain Gething I told you to look out for?"

"I do," said the other eagerly.

"Let the crew know that the reward is raised to five pounds," said the skipper, drawing strongly at his pipe.

"If the reward is riz to five pounds the cook 'll be 'ung for murder or som'think," said Henry. "It's no use lookin' to the crew for 'elp, sir—not a bit."

The skipper deigned no reply, and his message having been conveyed to the foc'sle, a scene of intense animation prevailed there.

"*I'm* goin' to have a go now," said Dick emphatically. 'Five pounds is worth picking up."

"I only 'ope as you won't 'ave the treat I 'ad," said the cook feelingly.

"Wot we want," said fat Sam, "is one o' them things people 'ave in the City—one o' the 'er what d'yer call 'ems."

"'Ansom keb?" suggested the cook.

"'Ansom keb, be damned!" said Sam scornfully. "One of them things wot 'as a lot o' people in, I mean."

"Tramcars," said the cook, who was all at sea. "But you couldn't take a tramcar all over the country, Sam."

"If anybody was to ask me, I should say you was a silly fool," said Sam impatiently. "I mean one o' them things people puts their money in."

The wondering cook had got as far as "automatic mach——" when Henry jostled him into silence.

"Wot are you gettin' at?" said Dick. "Why don't you talk plain?"

"Cos I can't remember the word," said Sam angrily; "but a lot o' people gets together and goes shares."

"You mean a syndikit," said Dick.

"That's the word," said Sam, with relief.

"Well, wot's the good of it?" said Dick.

"This way," said Sam: "we make up a syndikit and divide the money when 'e's found. It 'ud be a cruel thing, Dick, if, just as you'd spotted your man, I wos to come along and snap 'im up under your werry nose, for instance——"

"You'd better try it," said Dick grimly.

"It's a very good idea o' yours, Sam," said the cook. "I'll join it."

"You'd better come in, Dick," said Sam.

"Not me," said Dick; "it's five pounds I'm after."

"We shall be workin' agin you, you know, me an' the cook an' the boy," said Sam anxiously.

"Ho!" said Henry, "don't think I'm takin' a 'and, cos I'm not."

"Werry good, then," said Sam, "the—the——what d'ye call it, Dick?"

"Syndikit," said Dick.

"The syndikit is me and the cook, then," said Sam. "Give us your 'and, cook."

In this informal way the "Captain Gething Search Company" was founded, and the syndicate, thinking that they had a good thing, began to hold aloof from their fellows, and to confer darkly in remote corners. They expended a shilling

on a popular detective story, entitled "On the Trail," and an element of adventure was imported into their lives which brightened them considerably.

The following day the skipper spent hard at work with the cargo, bustling about with feverish energy as the afternoon wore on and left him to imagine his rival *tête-à-tête* with Annis. After tea a reaction set in, and bit by bit the mate, by means of timely sympathy, learnt all that there was to know. Henry, without a display of anything, except, perhaps, silence, learnt it too.

"It's in your favour that it's your own craft," said the mate; "you can go where you like. If you find the father, she might chuck the other feller."

"That isn't my object in finding him," said the skipper. "I just want to find him to oblige her."

He set off the following afternoon followed by the stealthy glances of the crew, who had heard something from Henry, and, first getting his beard trimmed at a barber's, walked along to call on Mrs. Gething. She was in, and pleased to see him, and hearing that his crew were also searching, supplied him with another photograph of the missing captain.

"Miss Gething well?" inquired the skipper as, after accepting an invitation to a cup of tea, he noticed that she only laid for two.

"Oh, yes; she's gone to London," said Mrs. Gething. "She's got friends there, you know."

"Mr. Glover," said the skipper to himself with dismal intuition. "I met a friend here the day before yesterday," he said aloud.

"Oh, yes—Mr. Glover," said the old lady; "a man in a very good position. He's very nice, isn't he?"

"Splendid," murmured the skipper vaguely.

"He would do anything for her," said the fond mother. "I'm sure it's quite touching the way he looks after her."

"Going to be married soon?" queried the skipper. He knew it was a rude question for a comparative stranger to ask, but he couldn't help it.

"When my husband is found," said the old lady, shaking her head sadly. "She won't marry till then."

The skipper sat back in his chair, and pushing his plate from him, pondered over this latest piece of information. It seemed at first an excellent reason for not finding Captain Gething, but the idea had hardly occurred to him before he dismissed it as unworthy, and manfully resolved to do his best. For an hour he sat listening to the somewhat prosy talk of the old lady, and then—there being no sign of Annis's return—he silently departed and made his way back to the *Seamew*.

CHAPTER VI

To the cook's relief he found that the *Seamew's* next voyage was to a little port on the West Coast named Cocklemouth, calling at the garrison town of Bymouth on the way. He told Sam that it was a load off his mind, and showed clearly by his manner that he expected the syndicate at least to accept his story. They spent most of their time in the galley, where, secure from money-grubbing eavesdroppers, they matured their plans over the washing of potatoes and the scouring of saucepans. "On the Trail" was remarkably clever, and they obtained many helpful suggestions from it, though the discovery that Henry had got hold of it, and had marked all the most valuable passages in lead pencil, caused them much anxiety.

The syndicate were the first to get ashore the evening they arrived at Bymouth. They had come to the conclusion in their deliberations that the only possible place in which a retired mariner would spend his evenings was a public-house, and they resolved to do them thoroughly.

"The worst of it," said Sam, as they walked slowly together to the town, "is the drinkin'. Arter I've 'ad five or six pints, everybody looks to me like Cap'n Gething."

"We won't 'ave no drinkin'," said the cook. "We'll do wot the feller did in that story. 'Ave you got sixpence about you?"

"Wot for?" inquired Sam carefully.

"Workin' expenses," replied the cook, dwelling fondly on the phrase.

"That'll be thruppence each, then," said Sam, eyeing him suspiciously.

"Sixpence each," said the cook. "Now do you know what we're goin' to do?"

"Chuck money away," hazarded Sam as he reluctantly drew a sixpence from his pocket and handed it to the cook. "Where's your sixpence?"

The cook showed it to him, and Sam, whose faith in human nature had been largely shaken by a perusal of the detective story referred to, bit it critically.

"We can't go into pubs without drinkin' in the ordinary way," said the cook, "so we're goin' in to sell bootlaces, like the chap in the book did. Now do you see?"

"Why not try something cheaper first?" growled Sam—"measurin' footmarks, or over-'earing fellers talking? It's just like you, cookie, doin' expensive things."

Under the cook's glance of silent scorn he became first

restive and then abusive, winding up finally by demanding his money back.

"Don't you be a fool!" said the cook coarsely. "You leave it to me."

"And get tied up in a chair with my own bootlaces p'raps," said the irritated seaman.

The cook, affecting not to hear him, looked out for a boot-shop, and having found one, walked in, followed by the discontented Sam, and purchased a shilling's-worth of laces.

"Wot am I to say?" demanded Sam surlily, as they stood outside, and the cook hung half a dozen laces over his arm.

"You needn't say anything," replied the cook. "Just walk in an' 'old 'em up in the people's faces, an' if anybody offers you a drink you may 'ave it."

"Thank you for nothin'," said Sam, with prophetic insight.

"You take all the pubs this side of the 'igh Street an' I'll take the other," said the cook. "And if you look as cheerful as you look now you ought to take a lot o' money."

He turned away, and with a farewell caution against drinking, set off. The stout seaman, with a strong distaste for his job, took the laces in his hand and bent his steps in the direction of a small but noisy tavern in the next street. The public bar was full, and Sam's heart failed him as he entered it, and, bearing the cook's instructions in mind, held up his wares to the customers. Most of them took no notice, and the only man who said anything to him was a red-nosed sergeant of marines, who, setting his glass with great deliberation on the counter, gazed fixedly at a dozen laces crawling over his red sleeve. His remarks, when he discovered their connection with Sam, were of a severe and sweeping character, and contained not the slightest reference to a drink.

In the next bar he met a philanthropist who bought up his whole stock-in-trade. The stout seaman was utterly unprepared for such kindness, and stood looking at him dumbly, his lips all a-tremble with naughty words.

"There, there," said his benefactor kindly. "Never mind about thanking me."

Sam obeyed him easily, and departing in silence, went off raving to the nearest boot-shop to buy more laces. Taught by experience, he put some of his new stock in his pocket, and with a couple of pairs in his hand, entered the next tavern on his beat.

The bar was pretty full, but he pushed his way in, and offering his wares in a perfunctory fashion, looked round carefully for any signs of Captain Gething.

"Outside!" said a smart barmaid with a toss of her head as she caught sight of him.

"I'm goin', miss," said Sam, blushing with shame. Hitherto most barmaids had treated him with kindness, and in taverns where his powers were known, usually addressed him as "sir."

"Down on your luck, mate?" said a voice as he turned to go.

"Starvin', sir," said Sam, who was never one to trouble about appearances.

"Sit down," said his new friend, with a nod at the barmaid, who was still regarding the seaman in a hostile fashion.

Sam sat down and mentally blessed the reservation regarding free drinks as his benefactor turned to the bar and gave his order. His eyes beamed softly with a mixture of gratitude and amusement as his new friend came back with a pint of ale and half a loaf of bread.

"Get through that, old chap," said the man as he handed him the bread; "and there's some more where that came from."

He sat down opposite, and taking a long pull at the pewter, watched with a kind smile to see the famished seaman eat. He noted as a strange fact that starving men nibble gently at the outside crust first, and then start on small, very small, mouthfuls of crumb, instinct rather than reason probably warning them of the dangers of a surfeit.

For a few minutes Sam, with one eye on the pewter and the other on the door, struggled to perform his part. Then he rose, and murmuring broken thanks, said he would take some home to his wife and children.

"Never mind your wife and children," said his benefactor, putting down the empty pewter. "You eat that up and I'll give you a couple of loaves to take home to them."

"My 'art's too full to eat," said Sam, getting a little nearer the door.

"He means his stummick," said a stern but youthful voice which the unhappy seaman knew only too well. He turned smartly and saw the face of Henry peering over the partition, and beside it the grinning countenance of Dick.

"He was on our ship this afternoon," continued his youthful tormentor as he scrambled still higher up the partition, and getting one arm over, pointed an accusing finger at Sam, who had been pushed back into his seat. "We gave him a lovely dinner, an' arter he'd eat it he went off on the quiet in one of our chap's clothes."

"That's right, mates," said the delighted Dick, nodding at the audience.

"One of our chaps named Sam," went on Henry—"one of the best an' kindest 'earted chaps that ever breathed."

"Regular brick he is," assented Dick.

"Fine, big, 'ansome man, he is," said Henry, "and this chap's got his clothes on."

The customers gazed sternly at Sam as he sat open-mouthed listening to these fulsome but untimely praises. In every gathering there is sure to be one or two whose self-imposed mission is to right wrongs, and one of this type present at once suggested returning the clothes to the rightful owner. His suggestion was adopted with enthusiasm, and a dozen men closed round the hapless Sam.

"Outside, gentlemen, please," said the barmaid hastily.

They went out in a cluster, the stout seaman in the centre fighting like a madman, and nearly overturning three soldiers who were passing. Two of them were named Murphy and one O'Sullivan, and the riot that ensued took three policemen and a picket to subdue. Sam, glad of a chance to get away, only saw the beginning of it, and consumed by violent indignation, did not pause until he had placed half a dozen streets between himself and the scene of his discomfiture.

He had no intention of breaking faith with the cook, but he had a pint and thought that circumstances justified it. Then he walked slowly up and down the street a little while, debating whether he should continue the search or return to the schooner. For a time he strolled on aimlessly, and then, resolving not to be defeated by the impertinences of Dick and the boy, paused before a high-class tavern and went in. Two or three well-dressed men, whose behaviour contrasted favourably with that of the vulgar crew he had just left, shook their heads, but not unkindly, and he was about to leave when a big black-bearded man entered.

"That's a poor game," said the big man, glancing at the laces.

"Yes, sir," said Sam humbly.

"You look as if you thrive on it," said the man somewhat sternly.

"It's only looks, sir," said Sam, shaking his head as he walked to the door.

"Drink, I s'pose," said the other.

"No, sir," said Sam.

"When did you taste food last?" continued the other.

"Yesterday morning," said Sam, clearing a soft piece of bread from his teeth with his tongue.

"Could you take something?" inquired the other.

Sam smiled expectantly and took a seat. He heard his new friend order a pot, and wiping his mouth on the back of his hand, tried to think of something nice to say as he

drank it. Then his blood froze in his veins, and his jaw dropped as the other came from the counter and held out half a loaf.

"There, my man," he said kindly, "put that inside you."

Sam took it and tried to put it into his pocket, and repeating his old tale about taking it home to the children, rose to depart.

"You eat that, and I'll give you a couple of loaves to take home to them," said the other.

The bread fell from Sam's nerveless fingers and rolled on to the floor. A bystander picked it up, and wiping it on his coat, returned it to him.

"Go on," said the big man, taking a deep draught of his beer—"eat away."

"I must see my children eat first," said Sam in a broken voice.

"You eat that bread or I'll call a policeman and give you in charge," said the other raising his voice. "I believe you're an impostor. Where's your hawker's license?"

In a state bordering upon frenzy Sam bit off a piece of the bread and tried to swallow it. He took up a water-bottle and drank some of the contents, and within five minutes had swallowed as many mouthfuls.

"Go on," said the donor sternly.

"I won't," said Sam fiercely; "damned if I will!"

The other rose and went to the door. "Just step this way a minute, constable," he said quietly.

He stood aside, and as Sam paused with the bread in his hand, the door opened and Dick and Henry entered, and shaking their heads, gazed sorrowfully upon him. The big man sat down and laughed until he cried as Sam, realising the plot of which he had been the victim, flung the bread at Henry and made for the door. He went down the road mad with indignation, and with a firm resolve to have no more to do with bootlaces, pitched them away.

"Hallo, Sam!" cried a figure from the other side of the road. "Any luck?"

Sam shook his head speechlessly.

"You've been drinkin'," said the cook as he came over.

"I ain't," said Sam. Then a base idea occurred to him, and he took the other by the arm.

"There's a pub down here, cook," he said in a trembling voice, "an' there's an old chap there I can't be certain of. S'pose you go an' have a look at 'im."

"Which one?" inquired his innocent friend.

Full of great joy, Sam led him to the place of his mortification, and waiting until he was fairly in, stood listening behind the door.

"Why don't they speak up?" he said crossly, as a low, indistinct murmuring reached him. He strained his ears intently, but could not catch anything, and losing all patience, was just about to push the door open and peep in when he heard a roar of laughter. Peal upon peal sounded until the bar shook with it, and an expression of peace and rest came over his face as he pictured the scene inside.

"Don't," said the cook's voice feebly.

There was another roar of laughter, to which Sam grinned a silent accompaniment.

"You'll kill me," said the cook, again in a choking voice.

"No worse for you than for me, my lad," said Sam, with great content.

There was another roar in which Sam, to his amazement, fancied that the cook joined. He was still listening in a state of maddening perplexity when he heard the cook's voice again.

"Poor old Sam!" it said distinctly. "Poor old Sam! I'd 'ave given anythin' to 'ave seen him."

The listener, stiffened up suddenly and holding his breath, went off on tiptoe down the street, the sounds of the foolish mirth in the bar ringing in his ears as he went. His brain was in a whirl, but two definite objects shaped themselves in his mind as he walked fiercely on—to smash first the syndicate, and then the cook. With these ideas firmly fixed he went aboard again, and going into the lonely foc'sle, climbed into his bunk and forgot his sorrows in sleep—in a sleep so sound that the others, upon their return an hour later, failed to wake him, until Henry, as a last expedient, threw a slice of bread at him. After which everybody had to keep awake all night to mount guard over their lives.

CHAPTER VII

THE search at Bymouth obtained no further assistance from Sam. For the remainder of their stay there he hardly moved from the ship, preferring to smoke his pipe in peace on board to meeting certain jocular spirits ashore who wanted to buy boot laces. Conversation with Dick and the boy he declined altogether, and it was not until they had reached Cocklemouth that he deigned to accept a pipe of tobacco from the cook's box.

Cocklemouth is a small lone place on the Welsh coast. When a large ship gets into the tiny harbour the inhabitants come down to see it, and the skippers of small craft pop up from their cabins and yell out to know where it's coming to.

Even when they see it bound and guided by many hawsers they are not satisfied, but dangling fenders in an obtrusive fashion over the sides of their ships, prepare for the worst.

"We won't find 'im 'ere, cookie," said Sam, as the syndicate sat on deck on the evening of their arrival gazing contemplatively at the few scattered lights which appeared as twilight deepened into night. "Lonesome little place."

"I ain't got much 'ope of finding 'im anywhere," assented the cook.

"If it wasn't for fear of Dick finding 'im," said Sam viciously, "or the boy, I'd just give it up, cookie."

"If anybody finds 'im it'll be the skipper hisself," said the cook, lowering his voice as the person alluded to passed them on his way ashore. "He goes to the police station with the portrait and arsts them there. What chance 'ave we got after that?"

The seaman shook his head, and after sitting for some time in silence, went ashore with the cook and drank himself into a state of hopeless pessimism. In this condition he forgave everybody, and feeling very low, made his will by the simple process of giving his knife to Dick and two and sevenpence to Henry. The trouble he had in revoking it next morning furnished a striking illustration of the depths to which poor humanity can descend.

It was bright and fine next day, and after breakfast his spirits rose. The persistent tinkle of a cracked bell from a small brick church in the town, and the appearance of two girls walking along the quay with hymn-books, followed by two young men without, reminded him that it was Sunday.

The skipper, who was endeavouring to form new habits, obeyed the summons of the bell. The mate took a healthful walk of three miles, while the crew sat about the deck watching the cook's preparations for dinner, and occasionally lending him some slight assistance. It was not until the meal was dispatched that they arrayed themselves in their Sunday clothes and went ashore.

Dick went first, having thoughtfully provided himself with the photograph which had been lent for the use of all of them. He walked at first into the town, but the bare shuttered shops and deserted streets worked upon his feelings, and with his hands in his pockets, he walked back in the direction of the harbour. Here he got into conversation with an elderly man of sedate aspect, and after a little general talk, beginning with the weather and ending with tobacco, he produced the photograph and broached the subject of Captain Gething.

"Well, I've seen a man very much like it," said his new friend after a prolonged study.

"Where?" asked Dick eagerly.

"I won't say it's the same man," said the other slowly, as he handed the portrait back, "but if it ain't him it's his brother."

"Where?" repeated Dick impatiently.

"Well, I don't know that I ought to interfere," said the man; "it ain't my business."

"If a bob would——" began Dick.

"It would," said the man, smiling as he pocketed it. "He lives at Piggott's Bay," he said impressively.

"And where might that be?" inquired the seaman.

The man turned and pointed across a piece of untidy waste ground to a coastguard's path which wound its way along the top of the cliffs.

"Follow that path as straight as you can go," said he.

"How far?" said Dick.

"Well, some people make a long journey of it, and some a short one," said the other oracularly. "Shall we say six miles?"

Dick said he would sooner say three.

"An easy six, then," said the man smiling indulgently. "Well, good-day to you."

"Good-day, mate," said Dick, and plunging into the *débris* before him, started on his walk.

It was unfortunate for him in the sequel that Sam and the cook, who had started out for a quiet stroll, without any intention of looking for Captain Gething, or any nonsense of that kind, had witnessed the interview from a distance. By dint of hurrying they overtook the elderly man of sedate aspect, and by dint of cross-questioning, elicited the cause of Dick's sudden departure.

"Which way is it?" inquired Sam.

"You follow him," said the man, indicating the figure in front as it slowly ascended the cliff, "and you'll be there as soon as he will."

The comfortable stroll was abandoned, and the couple, keeping at a respectful distance, followed their unconscious comrade. The day was hot, and the path, which sometimes ran along the top of the cliff and sometimes along the side of it, had apparently escaped the attention of the local County Council. No other person was in sight, and the only things that moved were a few sheep nibbling the short grass, which scampered off at their approach, and a gull or two poised overhead.

"We want to get there afore 'e does," said Sam, treading gingerly along a difficult piece of path.

"He'd see us if we ran along the beach," said the cook.

"We can't run on shingle," said Sam; "and it don't

seem much good just gettin' there to see 'im find the cap'n, does it?"

"We must wait for an hoppertunity," said the cook.

Sam grunted.

"An' when it comes, seize it at once," continued the cook, who disapproved of the grunt.

They kept on for some time steadily, though Sam complained bitterly about the heat as he mopped his streaming brow.

"He's going down on to the beach," said the cook suddenly. "Make a spurt for it, Sam, and we'll pass him."

The stout seamen responded to the best of his ability, and arriving at the place where Dick had disappeared, flung himself down on the grass and lay there panting. He was startled by a cry of surprise from the cook.

"Come on, Sam," he said eagerly; "he's going in for a swim."

His friend moved to the edge of the cliff and looked over. A little heap of clothing lay just below him, and Dick was striding over the sands to the sea.

"Come on," repeated the cook impatiently; "we've got the start."

"I should laugh if somebody was to steal his clothes," said Sam vindictively as he gazed at the garments.

"Be all right for us if they did," said the cook; "we'd have plenty o' time to look round this 'ere Piggott's Bay then." He glanced at Sam as he spoke, and read his horrible purpose in his eyes. "No, no!" he said hastily.

"Not *steal* 'em, cookie," said Sam seductively, "only bury 'em under the shingle. I'll toss you who does it."

For sixty seconds the cook struggled gamely with the tempter.

"It's just a bit of a joke, cook," said Sam jovially. "Dick 'ud be the first to laugh at it hisself if it was somebody else's clothes." He spun a penny in the air, and covering it deftly, held it out to the cook.

"Heads!" said the latter softly.

"Tails!" said Sam cheerfully; "hurry up, cook."

The cook descended without a word, and hastily interring the clothes, not without an uneasy glance seaward, scrambled up the cliff again and rejoined his exultant accomplice. They set off in silence, keeping at some distance from the edge of the cliff.

"Business is business," said the cook after a time, "and he wouldn't join the syndikit."

"He was greedy, and wanted it all," said Sam with severity.

"P'raps it'll be a lesson to 'im," said the cook unctuously.

"I took the bearings of the place in case 'e don't find 'em. Some people wouldn't ha' done that."

They kept on steadily for another hour, until at last they came quite suddenly upon a little fishing village situated on a tiny bay. Two or three small craft were anchored inside the stone pier, along which two or three small children, in all the restriction of Sunday clothes, were soberly pacing up and down.

"This must be it," said Sam. "Keep your eyes open, cook."

"What's the name o' this place, mate?" said Sam expectantly to an old salt who was passing.

"Stone-pen Quay," said the old man.

Sam's face fell. "How far is it to Piggott's Bay then?" he inquired.

"To where?" said the old man, taking his pipe out of his mouth and staring hard.

"Piggott's Bay," said Sam.

"You don't tell me you're looking for Piggott's Bay," said the old man.

"Why not?" said Sam shortly.

Instead of replying the old man slapped his leg, and with his pipe cocked at one side of his mouth, laughed a thin senile laugh with the other.

"When you've done laughin'," said the cook with dignity.

"But I ain't," said the old man, removing his pipe and laughing with greater freedom. "They're looking for Piggott's Bay, Joe," he said, turning to a couple of fisherman who had just come up.

"What a lark!" said Joe, beaming with pleasure. "Come far?" he inquired.

"Cocklemouth," said Sam with a blank look. "When you've done laughin', what's the joke?"

"Why, there ain't no such place," said the man. "It's just a saying in these parts, that's all."

"Just a *wot?*" said the bewildered Sam faintly.

"It's just a saying like," said the other, exchanging glances with his friends.

"I don't take you," said the cook. "How can a place be a sayin'?"

"Well, it come through a chap about here named Captain Piggott," said the fisherman, speaking slowly. "He was a wonderful queer old chap, and he got out of his reckoning once, and made; ah South Amerikey, warn't it, Dan?"

"I believe so," said the old man.

"He thought he'd found a new island," continued the fisherman, "an' he went ashore an' hoisted the Union Jack,

and named it arter hisself, Piggott's Bay. Leastways that's the tale his chaps gave out when they come 'ome. Now when anybody's a bit out o' their reckoning we say they're looking for Piggott's Bay. It's just a joke about here."

He began to laugh again, and Sam, noting with regret that he was a big fellow and strong, turned away and followed in the footsteps of the cook, who had already commenced the ascent of the cliff. They paused at the top and looked back; Stone-pen Quay was still laughing.

Moved by a common idea of their personal safety, they struck inland, preferring an additional mile or two to encountering Dick. Conversation was at a discount, and they plodded on sulkily along the dusty road, their lips parched and their legs aching.

They got back to the *Seamew* at seven o'clock, and greeting Henry, who was in sole charge, with fair words and soothing compliments, persuaded him to make them some tea.

"Where's Dick?" inquired Sam casually as he sat drinking it.

"Ain't seen 'im since dinner," said the boy. "I thought he was with you p'raps."

Sam shook his head, and finishing his tea went on deck with the cook, and gave himself up to all the delights of a quiet sprawl. Fatigued with their exertions, neither of them moved until nine o'clock, and then, with a farewell glance in the direction in which Dick might be expected to come, went below and turned in.

They left the lamp burning, to the great satisfaction of Henry, who was reading, and, as ten o'clock struck somewhere in the town, exchanged anxious glances across the foc'sle concerning Dick's safety. Safe and warm in their bunks, it struck both of them that they had been perhaps a little bit selfish. Half an hour later Henry looked up suddenly as something soft leaped on to the deck above and came pattering towards the foc'sle. The next moment his surprise gave way to indignation, and he raised his voice in tones of expostulation which Mrs. Grundy herself would have envied.

"*Dick!*" he cried shrilly. "*Dick!*"

"Shut up!" said Dick fiercely as he flung himself panting on a locker. "O my Lord, I have had a time!"

"I'm surprised at you," said Henry severely as he dragged some blankets from the bunks and threw them over the exhausted seaman. "Where's your modesty, Dick?"

"If you say another word I'll knock yer ugly little head off!" said Dick wrathfully. "If I hadn't been modest I should have come home by daylight. Oh, I have had a time! I have had a time!"

"Where's your clothes?" inquired Henry.

"How the devil should I know?" snapped the other. "I left 'em on the beach while I went for a swim, and when I come back they'd gone. I've been sittin' on that damned cold shingle since three o'clock this arternoon, and not a soul come near me! It's the first time I've been lookin' for Cap'n Gething, and it'll be the last."

"Oh, you've been at it, 'ave yer!" said Henry. "I told you you chaps would get in a mess over that."

"You know a damned sight too much for your age!" growled Dick. "There's no call to say anything to Sam and the cook about it, mind."

"Why not?" said Henry.

"Cos I say you're not to," said Dick ferociously. "That's why."

"P'rhaps they know," said Henry quietly. "Seems to me Sam's listenin' in his sleep."

Dick got up, and going to their bunks inspected the sleep of both his comrades cautiously. Then with a repetition of his caution, strengthened by fearful penalties for disobedience, went to his own bunk and forgot his troubles in sleep. He kept his secret all next day, but his bewilderment when he awoke on Tuesday morning and found the clothes in an untidy brown paper parcel lying on the deck led to its divulgence. He told both Sam and the cook about it, and his opinion of both men went up when he found that they did not treat the matter in the light of a joke, as he had feared. Neither of them even smiled, neither did they extend much sympathy; they listened apathetically, and so soon as he had finished, went straight off to sleep where they sat—a performance which they repeated at every opportunity throughout the whole of the day.

CHAPTER VIII

THE *Seamew* lay at Cocklemouth another three days, in which time Dick, after a twelve-mile walk, learnt all there was to learn about Piggott's Bay. The second outrage was likely to have seriously injured his constitution, but the silver lining of the cloud caught his eye just as he was closing it in sleep, and the tension was removed.

"I've been thinkin', Sam," he said next morning, "that I've been rather selfish over that syndikit business. I ought to 'ave joined it."

"You can please yourself," said Sam.

"But it's better late than never," said Dick, turning to the cook who had joined them. "I'm goin' to put you in the way of findin' Cap'n Gething."

The cook portrayed gratified surprise.

"I know for certain that he's livin' at a place called Piggott's Bay, a little place just up the coast here," continued Dick. "If you two chaps like to walk out this evening and find him you can have two quid apiece and just give me one for myself."

"Oh!" said Sam, and stood thunderstruck at his hardihood.

"But it wouldn't be fair to you, Dick," urged the cook. "We won't take no advantage of you. The five pounds is yours."

"I don't want it," said Dick earnestly. "I want to punish myself for being greedy. If you two 'll just go there and find him I'll take it as a favour."

"Oh, well, we'll go then," said the cook with deceitful joy.

"Dick's 'art's in the right place, cook," observed Sam. "We'd better get away directly arter tea."

"I'd like to shake you by the 'and, Dick," said the cook warmly.

"Me too," said Sam, taking it as the cook relinquished it. "You're a fair brick, Dick, an' no error."

"True blue," said the complimentary cook.

"We'll start directly arter tea if you'll get us the flag, Dick," said Sam.

"*Flag?*" said Dick—"*flag?*"

"Why, yes, the Union Jack," said Sam, looking at him in simple surprise. "It's no use going to Piggott's Bay without a Union Jack? Didn't you know that, Dick? Arter goin' there last night too!"

He stood in an easy attitude waiting for an answer and gazed in clumsy surprise at Dick, as that arch-deceiver stamped his way down below in a fury. He even went so far as to pretend that Dick had gone down for the flag in question, and gingerly putting his head down the scuttle, said that a pair of bathing drawers would do if it was not forthcoming—a piece of pleasantry which he would willingly have withdrawn when the time came for him to meet Dick at dinner.

By the time they reached Northfleet again all interest in the search had practically ceased. For one thing it was an unpleasant thing for grown men to be exposed to the gibes of Henry, and for another, looking at it in the cold clear light of reason, they could but see that that there was very little prospect of success. In the cabin pessimism was also to the front with the mate as its mouthpiece.

"It's against all reason," he said, after arguing the matter a little. "You can't expect to find him. Now take

my advice, you're doing better with a safe trade between here and Brittlesea—stick to that."

"I won't," said the other doggedly.

"It's hard on 'em," said the mate—"the old men I mean—chevying 'em and hunting 'em about just because they've got gray whiskers and are getting into years. Besides which, some of the crew 'll get into a mess sooner or later."

"Talk as much as you like you won't affect me," retorted the other, who was carrying on the conversation as he was down below washing.

"There you go again," said the mate, "making yourself look nice. What for? Another fellow's girl. Turn it and twist it as much as you please, that's what it comes to."

"When I want your advice," said the skipper, covering his confusion by a vigorous use of the towel, "I'll ask for it."

He finished dressing in silence and went ashore, and after looking about him in a perfunctory fashion, strolled off in the direction of Gravesend. The one gleam of light in his present condition was the regular habits of schools, and as he went along he blessed the strong sense of punctuality which possessed the teaching body at four o'clock.

To-day, however, his congratulations were somewhat premature, for long after the children had come and gone there was no sign of Annis Gething. He walked up and down the road wondering. Half-past four, five. He waited until six o'clock—an object of much interest to sundry ladies who were eyeing him stealthily from their front parlour windows—and was just going at a quarter-past when he saw her coming towards him.

"Back again," she said as she shook hands.

"Just back," said he.

"No news of my father, I suppose?" said Annis.

"None, I'm sorry to say," said the skipper. "You're late to-night, aren't you?"

"Rather."

"You look tired," said the skipper with tenderness.

"Well, I'm not," said Annis. "I just stayed and had a cup of tea with Miss Gratton. Mother has gone out, so I didn't hurry."

"Out now?" inquired he.

Miss Gething nodded brightly, and having by this time reached the corner of a road, came to a stop.

"I'm not going in just yet," she said, glancing up the road towards her house. "I'm going for a walk."

"I hope it will be a pleasant one," said Wilson, after a pause, devoted to wondering whether he might venture to offer to accompany her. "Good-bye." He held out his hand.

"Good-bye," said Annis; "if you like to call in and wait to see mother she will be pleased to see you, I'm sure."

"Is there anybody to let me in?" inquired Wilson.

"Mr. Glover is there, I expect," said Annis, looking steadily across the road.

"I—I'll call another time," said the perplexed Wilson, "but I should have thought——"

"Thought what?" said she.

"Nothin'," said he. "I——Are you going for a long walk?"

"Not very far," said she. "Why?"

"I suppose you prefer going alone?"

"I don't mind it," said Annis Gething; "but you can come if you like."

They turned down the road together, and for some time walked on in silence.

"What was that you were going to say just now?" said Annis, when the silence threatened to become awkward.

"When?" said Wilson.

"When I told you that Mr. Glover was at our house you said you should have thought——" She turned and regarded him with an expression in her eyes which he tried in vain to decipher.

"Well, I should have thought," he said desperately, "that you would have wanted to go there."

"I don't understand you," said Annis coldly. "I think you are rather rude."

"I beg your pardon," said Wilson humbly; "I'm very sorry, very."

There was another long silence, during which they left the road and entered a footpath. It was very narrow, and Annis walked in front.

"I would give anything to find your father," said Wilson earnestly.

"Oh, I wish you could, I wish you could," said Annis, looking at him over her shoulder.

"I suppose Mr. Glover is trying all he can?" said Wilson.

"I want my father!" said Annis with sudden passion—"I want him badly, but I would sooner anybody than Mr. Glover found him!"

"But you are to be married when he is found," said the puzzled Wilson.

"If Mr. Glover finds him," said Annis in a low voice.

"Do you mean to say," said the skipper (in his excitement he caught her by the arm, and she did not release it)—"do you mean to say that you are not going to marry this Glover unless he finds your father?"

"Yes," said Annis, "that is the arrangement. Mother fretted so, and I thought nothing mattered much if we could only find my father. So I promised."

"And I suppose if anybody else finds him?" faltered Wilson, as with a ruthless disregard of growing crops he walked beside her.

"In that case," said Annis, looking at him pleasantly, "I sha'n't marry. Is that what you mean?"

"I didn't mean quite that," said Wilson. "I was going to say——"

"There!" said Annis, stopping suddenly and pointing, "isn't there a fine view of the river from here?"

"Splendid!" said Wilson.

"It is my favourite walk," said Annis.

Wilson made a mental note of it. "Especially when Mr. Glover is at your house," he said foolishly.

"Mr. Glover has been very kind," said Annis gravely. "He has been very good to my mother, and he has gone to a great deal of trouble in his search for my father."

"Well, I hope he doesn't find him," said Wilson.

Annis turned and regarded him fixedly. "That is very kind of you," she said with severity.

"I want to find him myself," said Wilson, closely watching the river; "and you know why."

"I must get back," said Annis, without contesting the statement.

Wilson felt his courage oozing, and tried to hint at what he dared not say. "I should like you to treat me the same as you do Mr. Glover," he said nervously.

"I'll do that with pleasure," said Annis promptly. In spite of herself her lips quivered and her eyes danced.

"I've loved you ever since the first time I saw you!" said Wilson with sudden vehemence.

Utterly unprepared for this direct attack, Miss Gething had no weapon to meet it. The tables were turned, and reddening with confusion, she looked away and made no reply.

"I've spent days walking up and down the road the school is in because you were there," continued Wilson. "I've wondered sometimes that the school children didn't notice it."

Miss Gething turned to him a cheek which was of the richest carmine. "If it's any pleasure to you to know it, they did," she said viciously. "I taught one small infant the blessing of silence by keeping her in three afternoons."

"I can't help it," said Wilson. "You'll have to keep the whole school in before I get over my fondness for that road. What did she say?"

"Suppose we get back," said Annis coldly, and turning, walked silently beside him. Neither spoke until they reached the lane again, and then Wilson stopped and met her gaze full and fair. Miss Gething, after a brave trial, abandoned the contest and lowered her eyes.

"Will you serve us both alike?" said Wilson in a low voice.

"No," said Annis. She looked up at him shyly and smiled. A light broke in upon him, and seizing her hand he drew her towards him.

"No," said Annis, drawing back sharply; "it wouldn't be right."

Afraid he had gone too far, Wilson's cowardice got the better hand again. "What wouldn't?" he asked, with an awkward attempt at innocence. A tiny but ominous sparkle in Miss Gething's eye showed her opinion of this unfairness.

"I beg your pardon," he said humbly.

"What for?" asked Miss Gething innocently in her turn.

Soon tired of devious paths, in which he lost himself, Wilson tried a direct one again. "For trying to kiss you and then pretending I didn't know what you meant when you refused," he said bluntly.

"Captain Wilson!" said Miss Gething breathlessly, "I—I don't know what you mean."

"Yes you do," said Wilson calmly.

The sparkle came in Miss Gething's eye again, then she bit her lip and turned her head away, miserably realising her inability to treat this transgressor with the severity that he deserved.

"This is the first time you have ever said things of this sort to a girl, I should think," she said at last.

"Yes," said Wilson simply.

"You want practice," said Miss Gething scornfully.

"That's just what I do want," said Wilson eagerly.

He was moving towards her again, but she checked him with a look.

"But not with a girl who is half engaged to another man," she said, regarding him with soft eyes; "it isn't right."

"Does he know how it is?" inquired Wilson, referring, of course, to the absent Glover.

Miss Gething nodded.

"I think it's quite right and proper, then," said Wilson.

"I don't," said Annis, holding out her hand. "I'll say good-bye," she said steadily. "I won't see you again until my father is found. If Mr. Glover finds him I won't see you at all. Good-bye."

The skipper took her hand, and marvelling at his pluck, drew her, resisting slightly, towards him again. Then he bent his head, and, with the assistance of Miss Gething, kissed the brim of her hat. Then she broke from him and ran lightly up the lane, pausing at the end to stop and wave her hand ere she disappeared. The skipper waved his in return, and glancing boldly at a horse which had witnessed all the proceedings from over the hedge, walked back to Northfleet to urge his dispirited crew to still further efforts.

CHAPTER IX

To the skipper's surprise and disapproval Annis kept her word. To be sure she could not prevent him meeting her in the road when the schooner was at Northfleet, his attitude when she tried to being one of wilful and deliberate defiance. She met this disobedience adeptly by taking a pupil home with her, and when even this was not sufficient added to the number. The day on which she appeared in the road with four small damsels was the last day the skipper accompanied her. He could only walk in front or behind; the conversation was severely technical, and the expression on the small girls' faces precocious in the extreme.

The search went on all the summer, the crew of the *Seamew* causing much comment at the various ports by walking about as though they had lost something. They all got to wear a bereaved appearance after a time, which, in the case of the cook—who had risked some capital in the affair—was gradually converted to one of resignation.

At the beginning of September they found themselves at Ironbridge, a small town on the East Coast, situated on the river Lebben. As usual, the skipper's inquiries revealed nothing. Ironbridge was a small place, with absolutely nothing to conceal; but it was a fine day, and Henry, who disliked extremely the task of assisting to work out the cargo, obtained permission to go ashore to purchase a few small things for the cook and look round.

He strolled along blithely, casting a glance over his shoulders at the dusky cloud which hung over the *Seamew* as he went. It was virgin soil to him, and he thirsted for adventure.

The town contained but few objects of interest. Before the advent of railways it had been a thriving port with a considerable trade; now its streets were sleepy and its wharves deserted. Besides the *Seamew* the only other craft in the river was a tiny sloop, the cargo of which two men were unloading by means of a basket and pulley and a hand truck.

The quietude told upon Henry, who, after a modest half-pint, lit his pipe and sauntered along the narrow High Street with his hands in his pockets. A short walk brought him to the white hurdles of the desolate market-place. Here the town as a town ended and gave place to a few large houses standing in their own grounds.

"Well, give me London," said Henry to himself as he paused at a high brick wall and looked at the fruit trees beyond. "Why, the place seems dead!"

He scrambled up on to the wall, and, perched on top,

whistled softly. The grown-up flavour of half-pints had not entirely eradicated a youthful partiality for apples. He was hidden from the house by the trees, and almost involuntarily he dropped down on the other side of the wall and began to fill his pockets with the fruit.

Things were so quiet that he became venturesome, and, imitating the stealthy movements of the Red Indian, whom he loved, so far as six or seven pounds of apples would allow him, made his way to a large summer-house and peeped in. It was empty, except for a table and a couple of rough benches, and after another careful look round, he entered, and seating himself on the bench tried an apple.

He was roused to a sense of the danger of his position by footsteps on the path outside, which, coming nearer and nearer, were evidently aimed at the summer-house. With a silence and celerity of which any brave would have been proud, he got under the table.

"There you are, you naughty little girl," said a woman's voice. "You will not come out until you know your rivers perfectly."

Somebody was pushed into the summer-house, the door slammed behind, and a key turned in the lock. The footsteps retreated again, and the embarrassed brave realised that he was in a cruelly false position, his very life, so to speak, depending on the strength of a small girl's scream.

"I don't care!" said a dogged voice. "Bother your rivers! bother your rivers! bother your rivers!"

The owner of the voice sat on the table and hummed fiercely. In the stress of mental anguish caused by his position, Henry made a miscalculation, and in turning bumped the table heavily with his head.

"Ough!" said the small girl breathlessly.

"Don't be frightened," said Henry, popping up humbly; "I won't hurt you."

"Hoo!" said the small girl in a flutter; "a boy!"

Henry rose and seated himself respectfully, coughing confusedly, as he saw the small girl's gaze riveted on his pockets.

"What have you got in your pockets?" she asked.

"Apples," said Henry softly. "I bought 'em in the town."

The small girl extended her hand, and accepting a couple, inspected them carefully.

"You're a bad, wicked boy!" she said seriously as she bit into one. "You'll get it when Miss Dimchurch comes!"

"Who's Miss Dimchurch?" inquired Henry with pardonable curiosity.

"Schoolmistress," said the small girl.

"Is this a school?" said Henry.

The small girl, her mouth full of apple, nodded.

"Any men here?" inquired Henry with an assumed carelessness.

The small girl shook her head.

"You're the only boy I've ever seen here," she said gleefully. "You'll get it when Miss Dimchurch comes!"

His mind relieved of a great fear, Henry leaned back and smiled confidently.

"I'm not afraid of the old girl," he said quietly, as he pulled out his pipe and filled it.

The small girl's eyes glistened with admiration.

"I wish I was a boy," she said plaintively, "then I shouldn't mind her. Are you a sailor-boy?"

"Sailor," corrected Henry; "yes."

"I like sailors," said the small girl amicably. "You may have a bite of my apple if you like."

"Never mind, thanks," said Henry hastily; I've got a clean one here."

The small girl drew herself up and eyed him haughtily, but finding that he was not looking at her resumed her apple.

"What's your name?" she asked.

"'Enery Hatkins," replied the youth, as he remembered sundry cautions about the letter *h* he had received at school. "What's yours?"

"Gertrude Ursula Florence Harcourt," said the small girl, sitting up straighter to say it. "I don't like the name of Atkins."

"Don't you?" said Henry, trying not to show resentment. "I don't like Gertrude, or Ursula, or Florence, and Harcourt's the worst of all."

Miss Harcourt drew off three or four inches and drummed with the tips of her fingers on the table. "I don't care what you like," she said, humming.

"I like Gerty," said Henry with the air of a connoisseur, as he looked at the small flushed face. "I think Gerty's very pretty."

"That's what they always call me," said Miss Harcourt carelessly. "Does your ship go right out to sea?"

"Yes," said the boy. They had been blown out to sea once, and he salved his conscience with that.

"And how many times," said Gertrude Ursula Florence Harcourt, getting nearer to him again, "have you had fights with pirates?"

She left absolutely no loophole. If she had asked him whether he had ever fought pirates he would have said "No," though that would have been hard with her little excitable face turned towards his and the dark blue eyes dancing with interest.

"I forget whether it was six or seven," said Henry Atkins. "I think it was only six."

"Tell us all about them," said Miss Harcourt, shifting with excitement.

Henry took a bite of his apple and started, thankful that a taste for reading of a thrilling description had furnished him with material. He fought ships in a way which even admirals had never thought of, and certainly not the pirates, who were invariably discomfited by the ingenious means by which he enabled virtue to triumph over sin. Miss Harcourt held her breath with pleasurable terror, and tightened or relaxed the grip of her small and not too clean fingers on his arm as the narrative proceeded.

"But you never killed a man yourself," said she, when he had finished. There was an inflection, just a slight inflection, of voice, which Henry thought undeserved after the trouble he had taken.

"I can't exactly say," he replied shortly. "You see in the *h*eat"—he got it right that time—"in the *h*eat of an engagement you can't be sure."

"Of course you can't," said Miss Harcourt, repenting of her unreasonableness. "You *are* brave!"

Henry blushed.

"Are you an officer?" inquired Miss Harcourt.

"Not quite," said Henry, wishing somehow that he was.

"If you make haste and become an officer I'll marry you when I grow up," said Miss Harcourt, smiling on him kindly. "That is if you like, of course."

"I should like it very much," said Henry wistfully. "I didn't mean it when I said I didn't like your name just now."

"You shouldn't have told stories, then," said Miss Harcourt severely, but not unkindly; "I can't bear storytellers."

The conscience-stricken Henry groaned inwardly, but, reflecting there was plenty of time to confess before the marriage, brightened up again. The "Rivers of Europe" had fallen beneath the table, and were entirely forgotten until the sounds of many feet and many voices in the garden recalled them to a sense of their position.

"Play-time," said the small girl, picking up her book and skipping to the farthest seat possible from Henry. "Thames, Seine, Danube, Rhine."

A strong, firm step stopped outside the door, and a key turned in the lock. The door was thrown open, and Miss Dimchurch peeping in, drew back with a cry of surprise. Behind her some thirty small girls, who saw her surprise, but not the reason for it, waited eagerly for light.

"Miss Harcourt!" said the principal in an awful voice.

"Yes, ma'am," said Miss Harcourt looking up, with her finger in the book to keep the place.

"How dare you stay in here with this person?" demanded the principal.

"It wasn't my fault," said Miss Harcourt, working up a a whimper. "You locked me in. He was here when I came."

"Why didn't you call after me?" demanded Miss Dimchurch.

"I didn't know he was here; he was under the table," said Miss Harcourt.

Miss Dimchurch turned and bestowed a terrible glance upon Henry, who, with his forgotten pipe in his hand, looked uneasily up to see whether he could push past her. Miss Harcourt, holding her breath, gazed at the destroyer of pirates, and waited confidently for something extraordinary to happen.

"He's been stealing my apples!" said Miss Dimchurch tragically. "Where's the gymnasium mistress?"

The gymnasium mistress, a tall pretty girl, was just behind her.

"Remove that horrid boy, Miss O'Brien," said the principal.

"Don't worry," said Henry, trying to speak calmly; "I'll go. Stand away there. I don't want to be hard on wimmin."

"Take him out," commanded the mistress.

Miss O'Brien, pleased at this opportunity of displaying her powers, entered, and squaring her shoulders, stood over the intruder in much the same way that Henry had seen barmen stand over Sam.

"Look here, now," he said, turning pale; "you drop it. I don't want to hurt you."

He placed his pipe in his pocket, and rose to his feet as the gymnasium mistress caught him in her strong slender arms and raised him from the ground. Her grip was like steel, and a babel of admiring young voices broke upon his horrified ears as his captor marched easily with him down the garden, their progress marked by apples, which rolled out of his pockets and bounded along the ground.

"I shall kick you," whispered Henry fiercely—ignoring the fact that both legs were jammed together—as he caught sight of the pale, bewildered little face of Gertrude U. F. Harcourt.

"Kick away," said Miss O'Brien sweetly, and using him as a dumb-bell, threw in a gratuitous gymnastic display for the edification of her pupils.

"If you come here again, you naughty little boy," said Miss Dimchurch, who was heading the procession behind, "I shall give you to a policeman. Open the gate, girls!"

The gate was open, and Henry, half dead with shame,

was thrust into the road in full view of the cook, who had been sent out in search of him.

"Wot, 'Enery?" said the cook in unbelieving accents as he staggered back, aghast at the spectacle—"wotever 'ave you been a-doin' of?"

"He's been stealing my apples!" said Miss Dimchurch sternly. "If I catch him here again I shall cane him!"

"Quite right, ma'am! I hope he hasn't hurt anybody," said the cook, unable to realise fully the discomfiture of the youth.

Miss Dimchurch slammed the gate and left the couple standing in the road. The cook turned and led the way down to the town again, accompanied by the crestfallen Henry.

"'Ave a apple, cook?" said the latter, proffering one; "I saved a beauty a-purpose for you."

"No, thanks," said the cook.

"It won't bite you," said Henry shortly.

"No, and I won't bite it either," replied the cook.

They continued their way in silence, until at the market-place Henry paused in front of the "Farmer's Arms."

"Come in and 'ave a pint, old chap," he said cordially.

"No, thankee," said the cook again. "It's no use, 'Enery, you don't git over me in that way."

"Wot d'ye mean?" blustered the youth.

"You know," said the other darkly.

"No, I don't," said Henry.

"Well, I wouldn't miss tellin' the other chaps, no not for six pints," said the cook cheerfully. "You're a deep un, 'Enery, but so am I."

"Glad you told me," said the out-generalled youth. "Nobody'd think so to look at your silly fat face."

The cook smiled indulgently, and, going aboard, left his youthful charge to give the best explanation he could of his absence to the skipper—an explanation which was marred for him by the childish behaviour of the cook at the other end of the ship, who, taking the part of Miss O'Brien for himself, gave that of Henry to a cork fender, which, when it became obstreperous—as it frequently did on the slightest provocation—he slapped vigorously, giving sundry falsetto howls, which he fondly imagined were in good imitation of Henry. After three encores the skipper stepped forward for enlightenment, returning to the mate with a grin so aggravating that the sensitive Henry was near to receiving a thrashing for insubordination of the most impertinent nature.

CHAPTER X

FROM Ironbridge, two days later, they sailed with a general cargo for Stourwich, the *Seamew* picking her way carefully down the river by moonlight, followed at an ever-increasing distance by a cork fender of abandoned aspect.

A great change had come over Henry, and an attitude of proud reserve had taken the place of the careless banter with which he usually regaled the crew. He married Miss O'Brien in imagination to a strong man of villainous temper and despotic ideas, while the explanations he made to Miss Harcourt were too ingenious and involved to be confined in the space of a single chapter. To these day-dreams, idle though he knew they were, he turned as a welcome relief from the coarse vulgarity of the crew.

Sympathy had widened his ideas, and he now felt a tender but mournful interest in the skipper's affairs. He read aloud to himself at every opportunity, and aspirated his *h*'s until he made his throat ache. His aspirations also extended to his conversation, until at last the mate told him plainly "that if he blew in his face again he'd get his ears boxed."

They passed the breakwater and dropped anchor in the harbour of Stourwich just as the rising sun was glowing red on the steeple of the town church. The narrow, fishy little streets leading from the quay were deserted, except for one lane, down which sleepy passengers were coming in twos and threes to catch the boat, which was chafing and grinding against the timbers of the jetty and pouring from its twin funnels dense volumes of smoke to take the sting out of the morning air.

Little by little as the *Seamew*, who was not quite certain as to her berth, rode at anchor, the town came to life again. Men of marine appearance, in baggy trousers and tight jerseys, came slowly on to the quay and stared meditatively at the water or shouted vehemently at other men, who had got into small boats to bale them out with rusty cans. From some of these loungers, after much shouting and contradictory information, the *Seamew* discovered her destination and was soon fast alongside.

The cargo—a very small one—was out by three o'clock that afternoon, and the crew, having replaced the hatches and cleaned up, went ashore together, after extending an invitation to Henry—which was coldly declined—to go with them.

The skipper was already ashore, and the boy, after enduring for some time the witticisms of the mate, on the subject of apples, went too.

For some time he wandered aimlessly about the town,

with his hands in his pockets. The season was drawing to an end, but a few holiday-makers were lounging about on the parade or venturing carefully along the dreary breakwater to get the full benefit of the sea air. Idly watching these and other objects of interest on the sea-shore, the boy drifted on until he found himself at the adjoining watering-place of Overcourt.

The parade ended in two flights of steps, one of which led to the sands and the other to the road and the cliffs above. For people who cared for neither, thoughtful local authorities had placed a long seat, and on this Henry placed himself and sat for some time, regarding with the lenity of age the erratic sports of the children below. He had sat there for some time when he became idly interested in the movements of an old man walking along the sands to the steps. Arrived at the foot he disappeared from sight, then a huge hand gripped the handrail, and a peaked cloth cap was revealed to the suddenly interested Henry, for the face of the old man was the face of the well-thumbed photograph in the foc'sle.

Unconscious of the wild excitement in the breast of the small boy on the seat, the old man paused to take breath for the next flight.

"Have you—got such a thing as a—as a match—about you?" said Henry, trying to speak calmly, but failing.

"You're over young to smoke," said the old man, turning round and regarding him.

At any other time, with any other person, Henry's retort to this would have been rude, but the momentous events which depended on his civility restrained him.

"I find it soothing," he said with much gravity, "if I get overworked or worried."

The old man regarded him with unfeigned astonishment, a grim smile lurking at the corners of his well-hidden mouth.

"If you were my boy," he said shortly, as he put his forefinger and thumb into his waistcoat pocket and extracted a time-stained lucifer, "do you know what I'd do to you?"

"Stop me smoking?" hazarded Henry cheerfully.

"I would that," said the other, turning to go.

"How old were you when you started smoking?" asked the boy.

"About your age, I expect," said the old man slowly; "but I was a much bigger chap than you are. A stunted little chap like you ought not to smoke."

Henry smiled wanly, and began to think that the five pounds would be well earned.

"Will you have a pipe?" he said, proffering a gaudy pouch.

"Confound you!" said the old man, flashing into sudden weak anger. "When I want your tobacco I'll ask you for it."

"No offence," said the boy hastily, "no offence. It's some I bought cheap, and our chaps said I'd been 'ad. I only wanted to see what you thought of it."

The old man hesitated a moment, and then taking the seat beside him, accepted the proffered pouch and smelt the contents critically. Then he drew a small black clay from his pocket and slowly filled it.

"Smokes all right," he said after a few puffs. He leaned back, and half closing his eyes, smoked with the enjoyment of an old smoker to whom a pipe is a somewhat rare luxury, while Henry regarded his shabby clothes and much-patched boots with great interest.

"Stranger here?" inquired the old man amiably.

"Schooner *Seamew* down in the harbour," said Henry, indicating the distant town of Stourwich with a wave of his hand.

"Ay, ay," said the old man, and smoked in silence.

"Got to stay here for a few days," said Henry, watching him out of the tail of his eye; "then back."

"London?" suggested the other.

"Northfleet," said Henry carelessly, "that's where we came from."

The old man's face twitched ever so slightly, and he blew out a cloud of smoke.

"Do you live there?" he inquired.

"Wapping," said Henry; "but I know Northfleet very well—Gravesend too. Ever been there?"

"Never," said the old man emphatically; "never."

"Rather a nice place, I think," said Henry; "I like it better than Wapping. We've sailed from there a year now. Our skipper is fond of it too. He's rather sweet on a girl who's teacher in a school there."

"What school?" asked the old man.

The boy gave a slight laugh. "Well it's no good telling you if you don't know the place," he said easily; "its a girls' school."

"I used to know a man that lived there," said the other, speaking slowly and carefully. "What's her name?"

"I forget," said the boy, yawning.

Conversation flagged, and the two sat idly watching the last of the children as they toiled slowly towards home from the sands. The sun had set and the air was getting chilly.

"I'll be getting home," said the old man. "Good-night, my lad."

"Good-night to you," said the well-mannered Henry.

He watched the old man's still strong figure as it passed slowly up the steps, and allowing him to get some little distance start, cautiously followed. He followed him up the

steps and along the cliff, the figure in front never halting until it reached a small court at the back of a livery stable; then, heedless of the small shadow, now very close behind, it pushed open the door of a dirty little house and entered. The shadow crept up and paused irresolute, and then, after a careful survey of the place, stole silently and swiftly away.

The shadow, choosing the road because it was quicker, now danced back to Stourwich, and jumping lightly on to the schooner, came behind the cook and thumped him heavily on the back. Before the cook could seize him he had passed on to Sam, and embracing as much of that gentleman's waist as possible, vainly besought him to dance.

"'E's off 'is 'ead," said Sam, shaking himself free and regarding him unfavourably. "What's wrong, kiddy?"

"Nothing," said Henry jubilantly; "everything's right."

"More happles?" said the cook with a nasty sneer.

"No, it ain't apples," said Henry hotly; "you never get more than one idea at a time into that 'ead of yours. Where's the skipper? I've got something important to tell 'im—something that'll make *'im* dance."

"Wot is it?" said the cook and Sam together turning pale.

"Now don't get excited," said Henry, holding up his hand warningly; "it's bad for you, Sam, because you're too fat, and it's bad for cookie because 'is 'ead's weak. You'll know all in good time."

He walked aft, leaving them to confer uneasily as to the cause of his jubilant condition, and hastily descending the companion ladder, burst noisily into the cabin and surveyed the skipper and mate with a smile, which he intended should be full of information. Both looked up in surprise, and the skipper, who was in a very bad temper, half rose from his seat.

"Where've you been, you young rascal?" he asked, eyeing him sternly.

"Looking round," said Henry, still smiling as he thought of the change in the skipper's manner when he should disclose his information.

"This is the second time you've taken yourself off," roared the other angrily, "I've half a mind to give you the soundest thrashing you ever had in your life."

"All right," said Henry, somewhat taken aback. "When——"

"Don't answer me, you idle young rascal!" said the skipper sternly; "get to bed."

"I want to——" began Henry, chilled by this order.

"Get to bed," repeated the skipper, rising.

"Bed?" said Henry, as his face hardened; "bed at seven o'clock?"

"I'll punish you somehow," said the skipper, looking from him to the cook who had just descended. "Cook!"

"Yes, sir," said the cook briskly.

"Put that boy to bed," said the other, "and see he goes now."

"A' right, sir," said the grinning cook. "Come along, 'Enery."

With a pale face and a haughty mien, which under other circumstances might have been extremely impressive, Henry, after an entreating glance at the skipper, followed him up the steps.

"'E's got to go to bed," said the cook to Sam and Dick, who were standing together. "'E's been naughty."

"Who said so?" asked Sam eagerly.

"Skipper," replied the cook. "'E told me we wos to put him to bed ourselves."

"You needn't trouble," said Henry stiffly; "I'll go all right."

"It's no trouble," said Sam oilily.

"It's a pleasure," said Dick truthfully.

Arrived at the scuttle, Henry halted, and with an assumption of ease he was far from feeling, yawned and looked round at the night.

"Go to bed," said Sam reprovingly, and seizing him in his stout arms passed him below to the cook, feet first, as the cook discovered to his cost.

"'E ought to be bathed first," said Sam, assuming the direction of affairs; "and it's Monday night, and 'e ought to have a clean night-gown on."

"Is 'is little bed made?" inquired the cook anxiously.

"'Is little bed's just proper," said Dick, patting it.

"We won't bath him to-night," said Sam, as he tied a towel apron-wise round his waist; "it 'ud be too long a job. Now 'Enery, come on to my lap."

Aided by willing arms, he took the youth on to his knee, and despite his frantic struggles, began to prepare him for his slumbers. At the pressing request of the cook he removed the victim's boots first and, as Dick said, it was surprising what a difference it made. Then having washed the boy's face with soap and flannel, he lifted him into his berth, grinning respectfully up at the face of the mate as it peered down from the scuttle with keen enjoyment of the scene.

"Is the boy asleep?" he inquired aggravatingly, as Henry's arms and legs shot out of the berth in mad attempts to reach his tormentors.

"Sleeping like a little hangel, sir!" said Sam respectfully. "Would you like to come down and see he's all right, sir?"

"Bless him!" said the grinning mate.

He went off, and Henry, making the best of a bad job, closed his eyes and refused to be drawn into replying to the jests of the men. Ever since he had been on the schooner he had been free from punishment of all kinds by the strict order of the skipper—a situation of which he had taken the fullest advantage. Now his power was shaken, and he lay grinding his teeth as he thought of the indignity to which he had been subjected.

CHAPTER XI

He resolved that he would keep his discovery to himself. It was an expensive luxury, but he determined to indulge in it, and months or years later perhaps he would allow the skipper to learn what he had lost by his overbearing brutality. Somewhat soothed by this idea he fell asleep.

His determination, which was strong when he arose, weakened somewhat as the morning wore on. The skipper, who had thought no more of the matter after giving his hasty instructions to the cook, was in a soft and amiable mood, and, as Henry said to himself fifty times in the course of the morning, five pounds was five pounds. By the time ten o'clock came he could hold out no longer, and with a full sense of the favour he was about to confer, he approached the unconscious skipper.

Before he could speak he was startled by a commotion on the quay, and looking up saw the cook, who had gone ashore for vegetables, coming full tilt towards the ship. He appeared to be labouring under strong excitement, and bumped passers-by and dropped cabbages with equal unconcern.

"What on earth's the matter with the cook?" said the skipper, as the men suspended work to gaze on the approaching figure. "What's wrong?" he demanded sharply, as the cook, giving a tremendous leap on board, rushed up and spluttered in his ear.

"What?" he repeated.

The cook, with his hand on his distressed chest, gasped for breath.

"Cap-tain Gething!" panted the cook at last, recovering his breath with an effort. "Round the—corner."

Almost as excited as the cook, the skipper sprang ashore and hurried along the quay with him, violently shaking off certain respectable citizens who sought to detain the cook and ask him what he meant by it.

"I expect you've made a mistake," said the skipper, as

they rapidly reached the small street. "Don't run—we shall have a crowd."

"If it wasn't 'im it was his twin brother," said the cook. "Ah, there he is! That's the man!"

He pointed to Henry's acquaintance of the previous day, who, with his hands in his pockets, was walking listlessly along on the other side of the road.

"You get back," said the skipper hurriedly. "You'd better run a little, then these staring idiots 'll follow you."

The cook complied, and the curious, seeing that he appeared to be the more irrational of the two, and far more likely to get into mischief, set off in pursuit. The skipper crossed the road, and began gently to overtake his quarry.

He passed him, and looking back, regarded him unobserved. The likeness was unmistakable, and for a few seconds he kept on his way in doubt how to proceed. Then he stopped, and turning round, waited till the old man should come up to him.

"Good morning," he said pleasantly.

"Morning," said the old man, half stopping.

"I'm in a bit of a difficulty," said the skipper, laughing. "I've got a message to deliver to a man in this place and I can't find him. I wonder whether you could help me."

"What's his name?" asked the other.

"Captain Gething," said the skipper.

The old man started, and his face changed to an unwholesome white. "I never heard of him," he muttered, thickly, trying to pass on.

"Nobody else seems to have heard of him either," said the skipper, turning with him; "that's the difficulty."

He waited for a reply, but none came. The old man, with set face, walked on rapidly.

"He's supposed to be in hiding," continued the skipper. "If you should ever run across him you might tell him that his wife and daughter Annis have been wanting news of him for five years, and that he's making all this trouble and fuss about a man who is as well and hearty as I am. Good morning."

The old man stopped abruptly, and taking his outstretched hand, drew a deep breath.

"Tell him—the—man—is *alive?*" he said in a trembling voice.

"Just that," said the skipper gently, and seeing the working of the other's face, looked away. For a little while they both stood silent, then the skipper spoke again.

"If I take you back," he said, "I am to marry your daughter Annis." He put his hand on the old man's, and without a word the old man turned and went with him.

They walked back slowly towards the harbour, the young man talking, the old man listening. Outside the post office the skipper came to a sudden stop.

"How would it be to send a wire?" he asked.

"I think," said the old man eagerly, as he followed him in, "it would be the very thing."

He stood watching attentively as the skipper tore up form after form, meditatively sucking the chained lead pencil with a view to inspiration between whiles. Captain Gething, as an illiterate, had every sympathy with one involved in the throes of writing, and for some time watched his efforts in respectful silence. After the fifth form had rolled a little crumpled ball on to the floor, however, he interposed.

"I can't think how to put it," said the skipper apologetically. "I don't want to be too sudden, you know."

"Just so," said the other, and stood watching him until, with a smile of triumph twitching the corners of his mouth, the skipper bent down and hastily scrawled off a message.

"You've done it?" he said with relief.

"How does this strike you?" asked the skipper reading. "Your father sends love to you both."

"Beautiful," murmured Captain Gething.

"Not too sudden," said the skipper; "it doesn't say I've found you, or anything of that sort; only hints at it. I'm proud of it."

"You ought to be," said Captain Gething, who was in the mood to be pleased with anything. "Lord, how pleased they'll be, poor dears! I'm ashamed to face 'em."

"Stuff!" said the skipper, who was in high spirits, as he clapped him on the back. "What you want is a good stiff drink."

He led him into a neighbouring bar, and a little later the crew of the schooner, who had been casting anxious and curious glances up the quay, saw the couple approaching them. Both captains were smoking big cigars in honour of the occasion, and Captain Gething, before going on board, halted, and in warm terms noticed the appearance of the *Seamew*.

The crew, pausing in their labours, looked on expectantly as they reached the deck. On the cook's face was a benevolent and proprietary smile, while Henry concealed his anguish of soul under an appearance of stoic calm.

"This is the man," said the skipper, putting his hand on the cook's shoulder, "this is the man that found you, cap'n. Smartest and best chap I ever had sail with me!"

Flushed with these praises, but feeling that he fully deserved them, the cook took the hand which Captain Gething, after a short struggle with the traditions of ship-

masters, extended, and shook it vigorously. Having once started, he shook hands all round, winding up with the reluctant Henry.

"Why, I've seen this boy before," he said, starting. "Had a chat with him yesterday. That's what brought me down here to-day, to see whether I couldn't find him again."

"Well I'm hanged!" said the astonished skipper. "He's as sharp as needles as a rule. What were you doing with your eyes, Henry?"

In an agony of mortification and rage, as he saw the joy depicted on the faces of the crew, the boy let the question pass. The cook, at the skipper's invitation, followed him below, his reappearance being the signal for anxious inquiries on the part of his friends. He answered them by slapping his pocket, and then thrusting his hand in produced five gold pieces. At first it was all congratulations, then Sam, after a short hard cough, struck a jarring note.

"Don't you wish now as you'd joined the syndikit, Dick?" he asked boldly.

"*Wot?*" said the cook, hastily replacing the coins.

"I arst 'im whether he was sorry 'e 'adn't joined us," said Sam, trying to speak calmly.

The cook threw out his hand and looked round appealingly to the landscape to bear witness to this appalling attempt at brigandage.

"You needn't look like that," said Sam. "Two pun ten's wot I want of you, an' I'll take it afore you lose it."

Then the cook found words, and with Dick and Henry for audience made an impassioned speech in defence of vested interests and the sacred rights of property. Never in his life had he been so fluent or so inventive, and when he wound up a noble passage on the rights of the individual, in which he alluded to Sam as a fat sharper, he felt that his case was won.

"Two pun ten," said Sam, glowering at him.

The cook, moistening his lips with his tongue, resumed his discourse.

"Two pun ten," said Sam again; "an' I don't know what you're goin' to do with your half, but I'm goin' to give ten bob to Dick."

"Why don't you give the man his money?" said Dick warmly.

"Becos the syndikit 'ad all fell through," said the cook. "The syndikit was only a syndikit when we was both looking for 'im together. If the syndikit——"

"That's enough about 'em," said Dick impatiently; "give the man 'is money. Everybody knows you was goin' shares.

I'm ashamed of you, cook. I wouldn't have thought it of you."

It ended in simple division, Dick taking what was over on Sam's side and more than hinting that he was ready to do the cook a similar service. The cook turned a deaf ear, however, and declining in emphatic language to step ashore and take something, went and sulked in the galley.

At dinner-time a telegram came from Annis, and the next morning brought a letter from her which the skipper read aloud to the proud father. He read it somewhat jerkily, omitting sentences and halves of sentences which he thought might not interest the old man, or perhaps, what was more likely, would interest him a great deal. After that they were all busy taking in the cargo, Captain Gething, in shirt and trousers, insisting upon lending a hand.

The cargo was all in by five o'clock and the hatches down. Below in the cabin the two captains and the mate sat over a substantial tea.

"Get away about three, I s'pose?" said the mate.

The skipper nodded.

"Get away about three," he repeated, "and then for Northfleet. I'll have all the hands to the wedding, and you shall be best man, Jim."

"And Henry 'll be a little page in white satin knickers holding up the bride's train," said the mate, spluttering at the picture he had conjured up.

They all laughed—all except Henry, who, having come down with some hot water from the galley, surveyed the ribald scene with a scarcely concealed sneer.

Half an hour later the skipper and mate went ashore to transact a little business, leaving the old man smoking peacefully in the cabin. The crew, having adjusted their differences, had already gone ashore to treat each other to beer, leaving Henry in sole charge.

"You'll stay by the ship, boy," said the skipper, looking down on him from the quay.

"Ay, ay, sir," said Henry sulkily.

The two men walked along the quay and into the High Street, the skipper shrugging his shoulders good-naturedly as he caught, through a half-open door, a glimpse of his crew settling down to business. It was an example that in the circumstances seemed to be worth following, and at the next public-house the mate, sacrificing his inclinations to the occasion, drank port wine instead of his favourite whisky. For the same reason he put his pipe back in his pocket and accepted a cigar, and then followed his superior into the street.

"Where's a likely tailor's?" asked the skipper, looking round.

"What for?" asked the mate.

"I'm going to get some things for Cap'n Gething," said the other. "He's hardly the figure to meet his family as he is."

"Why didn't you bring him with us?" asked the mate. "How about a fit?"

"He wouldn't hear of it," said the skipper, pausing in deep contemplation of three wax boys in a tailor's window. "He's an independent sort of man; but if I buy the clothes and take 'em aboard he can hardly refuse to wear 'em."

He led the way into the shop and asked to see some serge suits. At the mate's instigation he asked to see some more. At the mate's further instigation he asked whether that was all they had got, and being told that it was, looked at them all over again. It is ever a difficult thing to fit an absent man, but he and the mate tried on every jacket in the hope of finding a golden mean, until the mate, dropping his lighted cigar in the coat-sleeve of one, and not finding it as soon as the tailor could have desired, the latter lost all patience and insisted upon them taking that one.

"It's all right," said the mate, as they left the shop with the parcel; "it's only the lining. I'd fixed my mind on that one, too, from the first."

"Well, why didn't you say so, then?" said the skipper.

"Got it cheaper," said the mate, with a wink. "I'd bet you, if it could only be known, if we'd been suited at first he'd ha' wanted ten bob more for it."

It was quite dark by now, and after buying a cap and one or two other small articles, the mate led the way into a tavern for another drink.

"There's no hurry," he said, putting his share of bundles on the table with some relief. "What's your poison this time, cap'n?"

CHAPTER XII

In less rapid times, before the invention of the electric telegraph, and other scientific luxuries, Captain Gething would have remained quietly on board the *Seamew*, and been delivered to his expectant family without any further trouble. As it was, the message in which Captain Wilson took such pride reached Mrs. Gething just as Mr. Glover—who had been sitting in her parlour all the afternoon, listening as patiently as he could to her somewhat uninteresting conversation—was on the point of departure. The effect on him was hardly less marked than on his hostess, and he went on his way to the railway station in a condition in which rage and jealousy strove for the mastery. All the way to town he pondered over ways and means to

wrest from his rival the prize which he had won, and by the time the train had reached Fenchurch Street he had hatched as pleasant a little plot as ever occurred to a man, most of whose existence had been spent amid the blameless surroundings of ladies' hosiery. Half an hour later he was sitting in the dingy furnished apartments of a friend of his who lived in a small house off the Walworth Road.

"I want you to do me a favour, Tillotson," he said to the unkempt-looking tenant.

"I shall be delighted," said Mr. Tillotson, sticking his hands in his pockets, and warming himself comfortably at a fire-stove ornament trimmed with red paper roses—"if I can, you know."

"It is a great favour," said Glover.

Mr. Tillotson, looking very despondent, said, of course, that would please him more.

"I wouldn't ask anybody but you to do it," said the wily Glover. "If it comes off all right I will get you that berth you asked me for at Leatham and Roberts'."

"It's coming off, then," said Mr. Tillotson, brightening visibly. "If you will wait a minute—if the girl is in I will ask her if she will go and get us something to drink."

"I had better begin at the beginning," said Mr. Glover, as, all the "ifs" having been triumphantly surmounted, he helped himself from a small flat bottle of whisky; "it won't take long."

He lit his pipe, and, plunging into his story, finished it without interruption.

"You are a deep one, Glover," said his admiring friend when he had finished. "I thought you had been very smart lately—not but what you were always a dressy man," he added thoughtfully.

"I believe in keeping my own things to myself," said Glover.

"And this bargee has got the old un," said Tillotson, using the terms Glover had employed in his narrative. "I don't see what is to be done, Glover."

"I want to get him away," said the other. "If I can't find him, nobody else shall, and I want you to help me."

"Go down to Stourwich, tie him up in a sack, and drown him, I suppose," said Tillotson, trying to live up to a reputation several lady friends had bestowed upon him of being sarcastic.

"Can you get away to-morrow?" demanded Glover impatiently.

"I am as free as the birds of the air," responded Tillotson gloomily; "the only difference is, nobody puts out crumbs for me."

"I can reckon on you, then," said Glover. "I thought I could. We have known each other a long time, Tillotson, There is nothing like an old friend when one is in trouble."

Mr. Tillotson assented modestly. "You won't forget about Leatham and Roberts?" he said.

"Of course not," said Glover. "You see, it won't do to be seen in this thing myself. What I want you to do is to come down with me to Stourwich and bring the old man to London; then I can find him at my own time, in the street, or anywhere, quite haphazard like."

"I don't quite see how it is to be done," said Tillotson.

"Meet me to-morrow morning at Waterloo, at ten minutes past eight," said Glover, finishing his glass and rising; "and we will have a try, at any rate."

He shook hands with his friend, and following him down the uncarpeted stairs, said a few words at the door in favour of early rising, and departed to his place of business to make his own arrangements about the morrow.

He was at the station and in the train first in the morning, Mr. Tillotson turning up with that extreme punctuality which enables a man to catch his train before it has got up full speed.

"I was half afraid at one time that I shouldn't have done it," said Mr. Tillotson, in self-congratulation, as he fell on to the seat. "Smoker, too! Couldn't have done better if I had been here at seven o'clock."

His friend grunted, and, there being nobody else in the carriage, began at once to discuss the practical part of the business.

"If he could only read we might send a letter aboard to him," said Mr. Tillotson, pushing his hat back. "The idea of a man his age not being able to!"

"He's one of the old school," said Glover.

"Funny sort of school," said Tillotson flippantly. "Well, we must take our chance of him going for a walk, I suppose."

They reached Stourwich soon after midday, and Glover, keeping a wary look-out for Wilson, proceeded slowly to the quay with his friend, leaving the latter to walk down and discover the schooner while he went and hired a first-floor room at the "Royal Porpoise," a little bow-windowed tavern facing the harbour.

"That's the one," said Mr. Tillotson, as he joined his friend upstairs and led him to the window; "that little craft there. See that old chap working with the rest?"

Mr. Glover, who was focussing a pair of cheap field-glasses on to the schooner, gave a little exclamation of surprise.

"That's him, sure enough," he said, putting down the glasses. "Now what are we to do?"

At Tillotson's suggestion they had some dinner, and Glover fumed the afternoon away, while his friend hung about the quay. After tea his impatience got the better of his caution, and, pulling his hat over his eyes, he went on the quay too. Fifty yards beyond the *Seamew* he found a post, and leaning against it with his friend, anxiously watched the deck of the schooner.

"There's three of 'em going ashore," said Tillotson suddenly. "Look!"

They watched breathlessly as the crew walked slowly off, and, dusk coming on, approached a little closer.

"There's that fellow Wilson," said Glover, in a whisper. "Don't look!"

"Well, what's the use of telling me?" said Tillotson reasonably.

"He's going ashore with another chap," continued Glover excitedly—"the mate, I expect. Now's your chance. Get him away, and I'll stand you something handsome—upon my soul I will!"

"What do you call something handsome?" inquired Tillotson, whose pulse was not so feverish as his friend's.

"Get him safe to London and I'll stand a fiver," said Glover. "Now go. I'll stay here."

Mr. Tillotson, having got matters on a business footing, went, and, carelessly twisting his small moustache, slowly approached the schooner, on the deck of which was a small boy.

"Is Captain Gething aboard, old man?" inquired Mr. Tillotson, in a friendly voice.

"Down the cabin, I b'lieve," said Henry, jerking his thumb.

"I should like to see him," said Mr. Tillotson.

"I've got no objection," said Henry.

Charmed with his success, Mr. Tillotson stepped aboard and looked carelessly round.

"He's an old friend of mine," he said confidentially. "What's that you're smoking?"

"Shag," was the reply.

"Try a cigar," said Mr. Tillotson, producing three in an envelope. "You'll find them rather good."

The gratified Henry took one, and, first crackling it against his ear, smelt it knowingly, while Mr. Tillotson, in a leisurely fashion, descended to the cabin.

A tea-tray and an untidy litter of cups and saucers stood on the table, at the end of which sat an old man with his folded hands resting on the table.

"Good evening," said Mr. Tillotson, pausing at the doorway and peering through the gloom to make sure, that there was nobody else present. "All alone?"

"All alone," repeated Captain Gething, looking up and wondering who this might be.

"It's too dark to see you far," said Tillotson in a mysterious whisper, "but it's Captain Gething, ain't it?"

"That's me," said the Captain uneasily.

"Going to Northfleet?" inquired Mr. Tillotson in another whisper.

"What do you mean?" inquired the captain quickly as he gripped the edges of the table.

"Are you sure it'll be all right?" continued Tillotson.

"What do you mean?" repeated the captain from his seat. "Speak plain."

"I mean that you had better bolt," said Tillotson in a hurried whisper. "There's a heavy reward out for you, which Captain Wilson wants. You can't do what you did for nothing, you know."

Captain Gething sat down in his seat again and shaded his face with his hand.

"I'll go back," he said brokenly. "Wilson told me he was alive, and that it was all a mistake. If he's lying to me for the price of my old neck, let him have it."

"What about your wife and daughter?" said Tillotson, who was beginning to have a strong disrelish for his task. "I saw in the paper last night that Wilson had got you. He's gone ashore now to make arrangements at the station."

"He had a letter from my daughter this morning," said the old man brokenly.

"He told you it was from her," said Tillotson. "Get your things and come quick."

Excited by the part he was playing, he bent forward and clutched at the old man's arm. Captain Gething, obedient to the touch, rose, and taking his battered cap from a nail, followed him in silence above.

"We're going for a drink," said Tillotson to the boy. "We'll be back in ten minutes."

"All right," said Henry cheerfully; "wish I was going with you."

The other laughed airily, and gaining the quay, set off with the silent old man by his side. At first the captain went listlessly enough, but as he got farther and farther from the ship all the feelings of the hunted animal awoke within him, and he was as eager to escape as Tillotson could have wished.

"Where are we going?" he inquired as they came in sight of the railway station. "I'm not going by train."

"London," said Tillotson. "That's the most likely place to get lost in."

"I'm not going in the train," said the other doggedly.

"Why not?" said Tillotson in surprise.

"When they come back to the ship and find me gone they'll telegraph to London," said the old man. "I won't be caught like a rat in a trap."

"What are you going to do, then?" inquired the perplexed Tillotson.

"I don't know," said the old man. "Walk, I think. It's dark, and we might get twenty miles away before daybreak."

"Yes, we might," said Tillotson, who had no fancy for a nocturnal pilgrimage of the kind; "but we're not going to.'

"Let me go alone," said the old man.

Tillotson shook his head.

"They'd be bound to spot you tramping about the country," he said confidently. "Now do let me know what's best for you, and go by train."

"I won't," said Gething obstinately. "You've been very kind, more than kind, in giving me warning. Let me go off by myself."

Tillotson shook his head and glanced carelessly in the direction of Glover, who was some few yards behind.

"I wish you'd trust me," he said earnestly. "You'll be safer in London than anywhere."

Captain Gething pondered. "There's a schooner about half a mile up the river, which is getting away about one o'clock this morning," he said slowly. "I've worked on her once or twice, and the skipper might take us if you can pay him well. He knows me as Stroud."

"If you'll wait here a minute or two I'll go to the railway station and get my bag," said Tillotson, who wanted to confer with his chief.

"I'll wait up the road under the arch," said Captain Gething.

"Now don't run away," said Tillotson impressively. "If you won't go by train, perhaps the schooner is the best thing we can do."

He set off to the station, and after a hurried consultation with Glover, returned anxiously to the arch. Gething, standing in the shadow with his hands in his pockets, was patiently waiting.

"It's all right," said Tillotson cheerfully; "and now for a sea voyage. You know the way to the schooner, I suppose."

They made their way back cautiously, Captain Gething turning off to the left before they reached the harbour and leading the way through dingy little streets of private houses and chandlers' shops. It was not a part usually frequented by people taking an evening stroll, and Henry, who had begun to get uneasy at their absence, and starting in search of them had picked them up at the corner, followed wondering.

His wonder increased as they left the houses and met the cool air blowing from the river. The road was dark and uneven, and he followed cautiously, just keeping them in sight, until at a tumble-down little wharf they halted, and after a low consultation, boarded a small schooner lying alongside. There was nobody on the deck, but a light showed in the cabin, and after a minute's hesitation they went below.

An hour or two passed, and the small watcher, ensconced behind a pile of empties, shivered with the cold. Unconscious of the amicable overtures in the cabin, which had resulted in the master of the *Frolic* taking a couple of cabin passengers who were quite willing to rough it in the matter of food and accommodation, and willing to pay for it, he was afraid to desert his post. Another hour passed. A couple of seamen came by his place of concealment, and stepping aboard, went down the foc'sle. A clock struck eleven, and a few minutes later the light in the cabin was extinguished.

The boy watched another quarter of an hour and then, the ship being dark and still, crept noiselessly on board. The sound of deep snoring came from the cabin, and gaining the wharf again, he set off as hard as he could run to the *Seamew*.

CHAPTER XIII

Wilson and the mate returned to the ship laden with their spoils, and pitching them on board first, descended themselves by a slower but pleasanter method.

"I expect our chaps are all ashore still," said the mate, looking round. "Pretty state they'll be in for a start. I suppose the boy's down with the cap'n."

"Just go down and send him up," said the skipper; "it's rather a delicate thing to do to give a man a suit of clothes. I don't want anybody standing round."

"There's no light," said the mate, looking towards the skylight. He went below and felt his way into the cabin.

"All in the dark?" he said cheerfully.

There was no reply. He fumbled about in the darkness for the matches, and having obtained them, struck a light and looked round. The cabin was empty. He opened the door of the state-room and peered in; that too was empty.

"He must have gone for a walk with the boy," said the skipper uneasily when he returned with the news.

He took up the parcel again and went below, followed by the mate, and for some time sat silently smoking.

"Nine o'clock," said the mate at last in consternation as the little clock tinkled the hour. "That confounded boys not

up to any mischief, I s'pose? He's been in a devil of a temper the last day or two."

"I don't see what mischief he could do," pondered the other, knitting his brows.

"Looks to me as if he's spirited him away," continued the mate. "I'll go ashore and have a look round and see whether I can see anything of them."

He took his cap from the locker and went. An hour elapsed, and the skipper, a prey to great anxiety, went up on deck.

The shops had closed, and with the exception of the street lamps the town was in darkness and the streets silent, except for a chance wayfarer. Two or three seamen came up the quay and went aboard the steamer in the next berth. A woman came slowly along, peering in an uncertain fashion at the various craft, and shrinking back as a seaman passed her. Abreast of the *Seamew* she stopped, and in the same doubtful manner looked down on the deck. The skipper crossed to the side, and straining his eyes through the gloom, looked up at her.

"Is this the *Seamew?*" inquired a fresh girlish voice.

"Annis!" shouted the astounded skipper. "Annis!"

He ran up the rigging, and stepping on to the quay, seized her hand. Then he drew her unresistingly towards him, and was in the act of passing his arm round her waist when he remembered his position and drew back awkwardly.

"Come on board," he said gently.

He straddled from the quay to the rigging, and extended his hand in the midst of a perfect silence, helped her to the deck.

"Where is my father?" she said eagerly.

Wilson made no reply.

"Where is he?" she repeated.

Wilson shook his head. "I don't know," he said gloomily, "I don't know. He was here an hour or two ago. He was here yesterday."

She caught his arm breathlessly.

"Where is he now? What have you done with him?"

Wilson told her all he knew, and having finished, watched her anxiously as she drew back a little and tapped on the deck with her foot.

A badly-blended chorus, making up in strength what it lacked in harmony, sounded on the quay, and gradually coming nearer, stopped at the *Seamew* for a final shout. The finale was rendered by the cook and Dick with much vehemence, while Sam, excited by his potations, danced madly before them.

"Silence up there!" shouted the skipper sternly, as Annis shrank away.

"A' right, sir," hiccupped Dick solemnly. "I'm lookin' after them. Mind how you break your neck, Sam."

Thus adjured, Sam balanced himself on the edge of the quay, and executing a double shuffle on the very brink of it by way of showing his complete mastery over his feet, fell into the rigging and descended. He was followed by Dick and the cook, both drunk, and both preternaturally solemn.

"Get below," said the skipper sharply.

"Ay, ay, sir," said Dick, with a lurch. "Come on, Sam, we—ain't wanted—here."

"It's all your damned dancing Sam!" said the cook—who had ever an eye for beauty—plaintively.

"Will you get below?" roared the maddened skipper, giving him a push.

"I'm very sorry," he said, turning to Annis as they disappeared; "everything seems to be going wrong to-night."

"It doesn't matter," she said coldly. "Good-night."

"Where are you going?" asked Wilson.

"Going to find an hotel," said Annis; "there's no train back to-night."

"Take the cabin," he said entreatingly, "I and the mate 'll sleep for'ard."

"No, thank you," said Annis.

She stepped to the side, and, assisted by the skipper, clambered up on to the quay again. The mate came up at the moment and stood eyeing her curiously.

"This is Miss Gething," said the skipper slowly. "Any news?"

"None," said the mate solemnly; "they've vanished like smoke."

"Is it certain," asked Annis, addressing him, "that it was my father?"

The mate looked at the skipper and pushed his cap back. "We had no reason to think otherwise," he said shortly. "It's a mystery to me altogether. He can't have gone home by train because he had no money."

"It couldn't have been my father," said Annis slowly. "Somebody has been deceiving you. Good-night. I will come round in the morning; it is getting late."

"Where are you going?" inquired the mate.

"She's going to look for an hotel," said the skipper, answering for her.

"It's late," said the mate dubiously, "and this isn't much of a place for hotels. Why not take her to the woman where her father has been staying? You said she seemed a decent sort."

"It's a poor place," began the other.

"That'll do," said Annis decidedly; "if it was good

enough for my father it is good enough for me. If it wasn't my father I may learn something about him. Is it far?"

"Two miles," said the mate.

"We'd better start at once, then," said the skipper, moving a step or two by way of example.

"And perhaps you'll walk down too," said Annis to the mate.

It went to the mate's heart to do it, but he was a staunch friend. "No, I think I'll turn in," he said, blushing at his rudeness; "I'm tired."

He lifted his cap awkwardly and descended. Annis, with her head at an uncomfortable altitude, set off with the skipper.

"I'm sorry the mate wouldn't come," said the latter stiffly.

After this they went on in silence along the quiet road, Miss Gething realising instinctively that the man by her side had got a temper equal to at least a dozen of her own. This made her walk a little closer to him, and once, ever so lightly, her hand brushed against his. The skipper put his hands in his jacket pockets.

They reached the late habitation of the mysterious Captain Gething without another word having been spoken on the journey. The mews was uninviting enough by daylight, by night it was worse. The body of a defunct four-wheeler blocked up half the entrance, and a retriever came out of his kennel at the other end and barked savagely.

"That's the house," said Wilson, indicating it—"number five. What's the matter?"

For Miss Gething, after making little dabs with her handkerchief at lips which did not require the attention, was furtively applying it to eyes which did.

"I'm tired," she said softly—"tired and disappointed."

She hesitated a moment, and then before Wilson had quite made up his mind what to do, moved proudly away and knocked at the door of number five. It was opened after some delay by an untidy woman in crackers and a few other things, who, having listened to the skipper's explanation, admitted Miss Gething to her father's room. She then saw the skipper to the door again, and having wished him a somewhat grim good-night, closed the door.

He walked back as sharply as he could to the schooner, his mind in a whirl with the events of the evening, and as he neared the quay broke into a run, in awkward imitation of a small figure approaching from the opposite direction.

"You little vagabond!" he panted, seizing him by the collar as they reached the schooner together.

"A' right," said Henry; "'ave it your own way then."

"Drop him overboard," said the mate, who was standing on the deck.

Henry indulged in a glance of contempt—made safe by the darkness—at this partisan, and with the air of one who knows that he has an interesting yarn to spin, began at the beginning and worked slowly up for his effects. The expediency of brevity and point was then tersely pointed out to him by both listeners, the highly feminine trait of desiring the last page first being strongly manifested.

"I can't make head or tail of it," said the skipper, after the artist had spoilt his tale to suit his public. "He's taken fright at something or other. Well, we'll go after him."

"They're getting away at about one," said the mate; "and suppose he won't come, what are you going to do then? After all, it mightn't be her father. Damned unsatisfactory I call it!"

"I don't know what to do," said the bewildered skipper; "I don't know what's best."

"Well, it ain't my business," said Henry, who had been standing by silently; "but I know what I should do."

Both men leaned forward eagerly.

"I may be a young vagabond," said Henry, enjoying to the full this tribute to his powers—"p'raps I am. I may be put to bed by a set of grinning idiots; I may——"

"What would you do, Henry?" asked the skipper very quietly.

"Go back an' fetch Miss Gething, o' course," said the boy, "an' take her down to the ship. That'll settle it."

"By Jove! the boy's right," said the mate—"if there's time."

But the skipper had already started.

"You're a very good boy, Henry," said the mate approvingly. "Now go down and watch the *Frolic* again, and as soon as she starts getting under way run back and let us know. If she passes before he comes back I'll hail her and try and find out what it all means."

Meantime the skipper, half walking, half running, went on his way to Overcourt, arriving at Stagg's Gardens in a breathless condition. Number five was fast asleep when he reached it and began a violent thumping upon the door.

"Who's there? What do you want?" demanded a shrill voice as the window was thrown up and a female head protruded.

"I want to see that young lady I brought here a little while ago," said the skipper—"quick."

"What, at this time o' night!" said the lady. "Be reasonable, young man, if you *are* sweethearting."

"Something important," said the skipper impatiently.

"Can't you tell me what it is?" said the lady, who felt that she was in a position to have her curiosity satisfied.

"Tell her I've got news of her father," said the skipper, restraining himself with difficulty.

The head disappeared and the window was closed. After what seemed an hour to the impatient man, he heard a step in the passage, the door opened, and Annis stood before him.

With a very few words they were walking together again down the road, Annis listening to his story as they went. It was a long way, and she was already tired, but she refused the offer of her companion's arm with a spirit which showed that she had not forgotten the previous journey. As they neared the *Seamew* the skipper's spirits sank, for the mate, who was watching, ran out to meet them.

"It's no use," he said sympathetically; "she's under way. Shall we hail her as she goes by?"

The skipper, leaving Annis unceremoniously on the quay, sprang aboard and peered anxiously down the river. The night was starlit, and he could just discern a craft coming slowly towards them.

"Hoist a couple of lanterns, Jack, and call the crew up quickly," he cried to the mate.

"What for?" said the other in astonishment.

"You light 'em," cried the skipper excitedly. "Henry, help me off with these hatches."

He was down on his knees with the boy unfastening them, while the mate, having lit a lantern, ran forward to rouse the men. The *Frolic* was now but twenty yards astern.

"Ahoy! schooner, ahoy!" bawled Wilson, running suddenly to the side.

"Halloa!" came a hoarse voice.

"Are you full up?" shouted the master of the *Seamew*.

"No," came the roar again.

"Drop your anchor and come alongside," shouted the skipper, "I've got to stay here another week, and I've got a dozen barrels o' herring must be in London before then."

The *Frolic* was abreast of them, and he held his breath with suspense.

"It won't take you half an hour," he shouted anxiously.

The grating of the cable was music in his ears as it ran out, and hardly able to believe in the success of his scheme, he saw the crew taking in the sail they had just begun to set. Ten minutes later the *Frolic* was rubbing against his side.

The hatches were off the *Seamew*, and a lantern swinging in her hold shed a sickly light upon the sleepy faces of her crew. The mate was at the foc'sle whispering instructions to Annis.

"Look alive," said the master of the *Frolic*, "I'll just take 'em on deck for the present."

He came fussily to the side to superintend, gazing curiously at Annis, who was standing watching the operations.

"What a nice ship!" she said. "May I come on board?"

"You're quite welcome if you don't get in the way," was the reply.

Accepting this qualified permission, Annis stepped on board and walked quietly round the deck. At the companion she paused and looked round. Everybody was busy; and trembling with nervousness, she hesitated a moment and then descended into the dark cabin.

"That you, captain?" said a voice. "What are we stopping for?"

Annis made no reply.

"Who is it?" said the voice again.

"Hush!" said Annis.

"Oh, all right," said Mr. Tillotson shortly, "What's wrong?"

Annis hesitated, waiting to hear another voice, but in vain. She fancied that she heard another person breathing, but that was all.

"Father!" she cried, suddenly. "It's me! Annis! Where are you?"

There was a great shout from the other side of the cabin, and in the gloom she saw something spring up and come towards her. Something which caught her in a mighty grasp and crushed her soft face against a long, stiff beard. Laughing and crying together she put her arms about its neck and clung to it convulsively.

"There, there, my lass!" said Captain Gething at last.

"We only stopped you by a miracle," said Annis hysterically. "The *Seamew* is alongside, and why you wanted to run away again I don't know."

"I don't understand," said Captain Gething wearily.

"You can understand that *I* wouldn't take you into danger," said Annis tenderly. "Put your coat on and come with me."

Without another word Captain Gething did as he was bid. He stopped, as though to speak to Tillotson, and then thinking better of it, followed his daughter on deck.

"I'm not coming with you, cap'n," he said, as that ardent mariner passed them rolling a barrel along the deck.

"A' right," said the other briefly; "you won't get your money back."

In a shamefaced fashion Captain Gething, still holding his daughter's arm, stepped on board the *Seamew* and shook hands with its master. By the time he was half through his story there was a burning desire on the part of the skipper to go down and have a look at Tillotson—a desire peremptorily

checked by Annis, who had an erroneous opinion concerning that gentleman's identity, and the *Frolic* having taken in its herrings, sheered off with a friendly good-night. The crew of the *Seamew* watched her until she had her anchor up, and then, at the impatient suggestion of Henry who was stage-managing, went below.

"Are you satisfied now?" inquired Wilson in a low voice. as Captain Gething, with a wisdom born of years, went slowly below.

"Quite," breathed Annis softly.

"I'm not," said Wilson, in tones full of meaning.

Miss Gething smiled, and leaning against the side surveyed, with some interest, the dark water and the sleeping town. She did not move when Wilson came and stood by her, and when he took her hand, made no protest.

"I'm not satisfied—yet," said Wilson, raising her hand to his lips.

His eye caught the two lanterns which were burning somewhat garishly, and crossing over, he took them down and blew them out. He turned suddenly at the sound of a smothered laugh, a moment too late. Annis Gething had gone below.

THE BROWN MAN'S SERVANT.

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CHAPTER I

THE shop of Solomon Hyams stood in a small thoroughfare branching off the Commercial Road. In its windows unredeemed pledges of all kinds, from old-time watches to seamen's boots, appealed to all tastes and requirements. Bundles of cigars, candidly described as "wonderful," were marked at absurdly low figures, while silver watches endeavoured to excuse the clumsiness of their make by describing themselves as "strong workmen's." The side entrance, up a narrow alley, was surmounted by the usual three brass balls, and here Mr. Hyams' clients were wont to call. They entered as optimists, smiled confidently upon Mr. Hyams, argued, protested shrilly, and left the establishment pessimists of a most pronounced and virulent type.

None of these things, however, disturbed the pawnbroker. The drunken client who endeavoured to bail out his Sunday clothes with a tram ticket was accommodated with a chair, while the assistant went to hunt up his friends and contract for a speedy removal; the old woman who, with a view of obtaining a higher advance than usual, poured a tale of grievous woe into the hardened ears of Mr. Hyams, found herself left to the same invaluable assistant, and, realising her failure, would at once become cheerful and take what was offered. Mr. Hyams' methods of business were quiet and unostentatious, and rumour had it that he might retire at any time and live in luxury.

It was a cold, cheerless afternoon in November as Mr. Hyams, who had occasional hazy ideas of hygiene, stood at his door taking the air. It was an atmosphere laden with soot and redolent of many blended odours, but after the fusty smell of the shop it was almost health-giving. In the large public-house opposite, with its dirty windows and faded sign-boards, the gas was already being lit, which should change it from its daylight dreariness to a resort of light and life.

Mr. Hyams, who was never in a hurry to light up his own premises, many of his clients preferring the romantic light which comes between day and night for their visits, was about to leave the chilly air for the warmth inside, when his attention was attracted by a seaman of sturdy aspect stopping and looking in at his window. Mr. Hyams rubbed his hands softly. There was an air of comfort and prosperity about this

seaman, and the pawnbroker had many small articles in his window, utterly useless to the man, which he would have liked to have sold him.

The man came from the window, made as though to pass, and then paused irresolute before the pawnbroker.

"You want a watch?" said the latter genially. "Come inside."

Mr. Hyams went behind his counter and waited.

"I don't want to buy nothing, and I don't want to pawn nothing," said the sailor. "What do you think o' that?"

Mr. Hyams, who objected to riddles, especially those which seemed to be against business, eyed him unfavourably from beneath his shaggy eyebrows.

"We might have a little quiet talk together," said the seaman, "you an' me; we might do a little bit o' business together, you an' me. In the parler, shall we say, over a glass o' something hot?"

Mr. Hyams hesitated. He was not averse to a little business of an illicit nature, but there rose up vividly before him the picture of another sailor who had made much the same sort of proposal, and, after four glasses of rum, had merely suggested to him that he should lend him twenty pounds on the security of an I.O.U. It was long since, but the memory of it still rankled.

"What sort of business is it?" he inquired.

"Business that's too big for you, p'raps," said the sailor with a lordly air. "I'll try a bigger place. What's that lantern-faced swab shoving his ugly mug into the daylight for?"

"Get off," said the pawnbroker to the assistant, who was quietly and unobtrusively making a third. "Mind the shop. This gentleman and I have business in the parlour. Come this way, sir."

He raised the flap of the counter, and led the way to a small, untidy room at the back of the shop. A copper kettle was boiling on the fire, and the table was already laid for tea. The pawnbroker, motioning his visitor to a dingy leather armchair, went to a cupboard and produced a bottle of rum, three parts full, and a couple of glasses.

"Tea for me," said the seaman, eyeing the bottle wistfully.

The pawnbroker pricked up his ears. "Nonsense," he said, with an attempt at heartiness, "a jolly fellow like you don't want tea. Have some o' this."

"Tea, confound yer!" said the other. "When I say tea, I mean tea."

The pawnbroker, repressing his choler, replaced the bottle, and, seating himself at the table, reached over for the

kettle, and made the tea. It was really a pleasing picture of domestic life, and would have looked well in a lantern slide at a temperance lecture, the long, gaunt Jew and the burly seaman hobnobbing over the blameless teapot. But Mr. Hyams grew restless. He was intent upon business; but the other, so far as his inroads on the teapot and the eatables gave any indication, seemed to be bent only upon pleasure. Once again the picture of the former sailor rose before Mr. Hyams' eyes, and he scowled fiercely as the seaman pushed his cup up for the fourth time.

"And now for a smoke," said his visitor, as he settled back in his chair. "A good 'un, mind. Lord, this is comfort! It's the first bit o' comfort I've 'ad since I come ashore five days ago."

The pawnbroker grunted, and producing a couple of black, greasy-looking cigars, gave one to his guest. They both fell to smoking, the former ill at ease, the latter with his feet spread out on the small fender, making the very utmost of his bit of comfort.

"Are you a man as is fond of asking questions?" he said at length.

"No," said the pawnbroker, shutting his lips illustratively.

"Suppose," said the sailor, leaning forward intently—"suppose a man came to you an' ses——there's that confounded assistant of yours peeping through the door."

The pawnbroker got up almost as exasperated as the seaman, and, after rating his assistant through the half-open door, closed it with a bang, and pulled down a small blind over the glass.

"Suppose a man came to you," resumed the sailor, after the pawnbroker had seated himself again, "and asked you for five hundred pounds for something. Have you got it?"

"Not here," said the pawnbroker suspiciously. "I don't keep any money on the premises."

"You could get it, though?" suggested the other.

"We'll see," said the pawnbroker; "five hundred pounds is a fortune—five hundred pounds, why it takes years of work—five hundred pounds——"

"I don't want no blessed psalms," said the seaman abruptly; "but, look here, suppose I wanted five hundred pounds for something, and you wouldn't give it. How am I to know you wouldn't give information to the police if I didn't take what you offered me for it?"

The pawnbroker threw up his huge palms in virtuous horror.

"I'd mark you for it if you did," said the seaman menacingly, through his teeth. "It 'ud be the worst day's work

you ever did. Will you take it or leave it at my price, an' if you won't give it, leave me to go as I came?"

"I will," said the pawnbroker solemnly.

The seaman laid his cigar in the tray, where it expired in a little puddle of tea, and, undoing his coat, cautiously took from his waist a canvas belt. In a hesitating fashion he dangled the belt in his hands, looking from the Jew to the door, and from the door back to the Jew again. Then from a pocket in the belt he took something wrapped in a small piece of dirty flannel, and, unrolling it, deposited on the table a huge diamond, whose smouldering fires flashed back in many colours the light from the gas.

The Jew, with an exclamation, reached forward to handle it, but the sailor thrust him back.

"Hands of," he said grimly. "None of your ringing the changes on me."

He tipped it over with his finger-nail on the table from side to side, the other, with his head bent down, closely inspecting it. Then, as a great indulgence, he laid it on the Jew's open palm for a few seconds.

"Five hundred pounds," he said, taking it in his own hands again.

The pawnbroker laughed. It was a laugh which he kept for business purposes, and would have formed a valuable addition to the goodwill of the shop.

"I'll give you fifty," he said, after he had regained his composure.

The seaman replaced the gem in its wrapper again.

"Well, I'll give you seventy, and risk whether I lose over it," continued the pawnbroker.

"Five hundred's my price," said the seaman calmly, as he placed the belt about his waist and began to buckle it up.

"Seventy-five," said the pawnbroker persuasively.

"Look here," said the seaman, regarding him sternly, "you drop it. I'm not going to haggle with you. I'm not going to haggle with any man. I ain't no judge o' diamonds, but I've 'ad cause to know as this is something special. See here."

He rolled back the coat sleeve from his brawny arm, and revealed a long, newly healed scar.

"I risked my life for that stone," he said slowly. "I value my life at five hundred pounds. It's likely worth more than as many thousands, and you know it. However, good night to you, mate. How much for the tea?"

He put his hand contemptuously in his trouser pocket, and pulled out some small change.

"There's the risk of getting rid of the stone," said the pawnbroker, pushing aside the proffered coin. "Where did it come from? Has it got a history?"

"Not in Europe it ain't," said the seaman. "So far as I know, you an' me an' one other are the only white men as know of it. That's all I'm going to tell you."

"Do you mind waiting while I go and fetch a friend of mine to see it?" inquired the pawnbroker. "You needn't be afraid," he added hastily. "He's a respectable man and as close as the grave."

"I'm not afraid," said the seaman quietly. "But no larks, mind. I'm not a nice man to play them on. I'm pretty strong, an' I've got something else besides."

He settled himself in the armchair again, and, accepting another cigar, watched his host as he took his hat from the sideboard.

"I'll be back as soon as I can," said the latter somewhat anxiously. "You won't go before I come."

"Not me," said the seaman bluntly. "When I say a thing I stick to it. I don't haggle, and haggle, and——" he paused a moment for a word, "and haggle," he concluded.

Left to himself he smoked on contentedly, blandly undisturbed by the fact that the assistant looked in at the door occasionally, to see that things were all right. It was quite a new departure for Mr. Hyams to leave his parlour to a stranger, and the assistant felt a sense of responsibility so great that it was a positive relief to him when his master returned, accompanied by another man.

"This is my friend," said Mr. Hyams, as they entered the parlour and closed the door. "You might let him see the stone."

The seaman took off his belt again, and placing the diamond in his hand held it before the stranger who, making no attempt to take it, turned it over with his finger and examined it critically.

"Are you going to sea again just yet?" he inquired softly.

"Thursday night," said the seaman. "Five hundred is my price; p'raps he told you. I'm not going to haggle."

"Just so, just so," said the other quietly. "It's worth five hundred."

"Spoke like a man," said the seaman warmly.

"I like to deal with a man who knows his own mind," said the stranger, "it saves trouble. But if we buy it for that amount you must do one thing for us. Keep quiet and don't touch a drop of liquor until you sail, and not a word to any body."

"You needn't be afraid o' the licker," said the sailor grimly. "I shan't touch that for my own sake."

"He's a teetotaler," explained the pawnbroker.

"He's not," said the seaman indignantly.

"Why won't you drink, then?" asked the other man.

"Fancy," said the seaman drily, and closed his mouth.

Without another word the stranger turned to the pawnbroker, who, taking a pocket-book from his coat, counted out the amount in notes. These, after the sailor had examined them in every possible manner, he rolled up and put in his pocket, then without a word he took out the diamond again and laid it silently on the table. Mr. Hyams, his fingers trembling with eagerness, took it up and examined it delightedly.

"You've got it a bargain," said the seaman. "Good-night, gentlemen. I hope, for your sakes, nobody'll know I've parted with it. Keep your eyes open and trust nobody. When you see black, smell mischief. I'm glad to get rid of it."

He threw his head back, and, expanding his chest as though he already breathed more freely, nodded to both men, and, walking through the shop, passed out into the street and disappeared.

Long after he had gone, the pawnbroker and his friend, Levi, sat with the door locked and the diamond before them, eagerly inspecting it.

"It's a great risk," said the pawnbroker. "A stone like that generally makes some noise."

"Anything good is risky," said the other somewhat contemptuously. "You don't expect to get a windfall like that without any drawback, do you?"

He took the stone in his hand again, and eyed it lovingly.

"It's from the East somewhere," he said quietly. "It's badly cut, but it's a diamond of diamonds, a king of gems."

"I don't want any trouble with the police," said the pawnbroker, as he took it from him.

"You are talking now as though you have just made a small advance on a stolen overcoat," said his friend impatiently. "A risk like that—and you have done it before now—is a foolish one to run, the game is not worth the candle. But this—why it warms one's blood to look at it."

"Well, I'll leave it with you," said the pawnbroker. "If you do well with it I ought not to want to work any more."

The other placed it in an inside pocket, while the owner watched him anxiously.

"Don't let any accident happen to you to-night, Levi," he said nervously.

"Thanks for your concern," said Levi grimacing. "I shall probably be careful for my own sake."

He buttoned up his coat and, drinking a glass of hot whiskey, went out whistling. He had just reached the door when the pawnbroker called him back.

"If you like to take a cab, Levi," he said, in a low voice so that the assistant should not hear, "I'll pay for it."

"I'll take an omnibus," said Levi, smiling quietly. "You're getting extravagant, Hyams. Besides, fancy the humour of sitting next to a pickpocket with this on me."

He waved a cheery farewell, and the pawnbroker, watching him from the door scowled angrily as he saw his light-hearted friend hail an omnibus at the corner and board it. Then he went back to the shop, and his every-day business of making advances on flat-irons and other realisable assets of the neighbourhood.

At ten o'clock he closed for the night, the assistant hurriedly pulling down the shutters that his time for recreation might not be unduly curtailed. He slept off the premises, and the pawnbroker, after his departure, made a light supper, and sat revolving the affairs of the day over another of his black cigars until nearly midnight. Then, well contented with himself, he went up the bare, dirty stairs to his room and went to bed, and despite the excitement of the evening, was soon in a loud slumber, from which he was aroused by a distant and sustained knocking.

CHAPTER II

At first the noise mingled with his dreams and helped to form them. He was down a mine, and grimy workers with strong picks were knocking diamonds from the walls, diamonds so large that he became despondent at the comparative smallness of his own. Then he awoke suddenly and sat up with a start, rubbing his eyes. The din was infernal to a man who liked to do a quiet business in an unobtrusive way. It was a knocking which he usually associated with the police, and it came from his side door. With a sense of evil strong upon him, the Jew sprang from his bed, and, slipping the catch, noiselessly opened the window and thrust his head out. In the light of a lamp which projected from the brick wall at the other end of the alley he saw a figure below.

"Hulloa!" said the Jew harshly.

His voice was drowned in the noise.

"What do you want?" he yelled. "Hulloa, there! What do you want, I say?"

The knocking ceased, and the figure, stepping back a little, looked up at the window.

"Come down and open the door," said a voice which the pawnbroker recognised as the sailor's.

"Go away," he said, in a low, stern voice. "Do you want to rouse the neighbourhood?"

"Come down and let me in," said the other. "It's for your own good. You're a dead man if you don't."

Impressed by his manner the Jew, after bidding him shortly not to make any more noise, lit his candle, and, dressing hurriedly, took the light in his hand and went grumbling downstairs into the shop.

"Now, what do you want?" he said through the door.

"Let me in and I'll tell you," said the other, "or I'll bawl it through the keyhole, if you like."

The Jew, placing the candle on the counter, drew back the heavy bolts and cautiously opened the door. The seaman stepped in, and, as the other closed the door, vaulted on to the counter and sat there with his legs dangling.

"That's right," he said, nodding approvingly in the direction of the Jew's right hand. "I hope you know how to use it."

"What do you want?" demanded the other irritably, putting his hand behind him. "What time o' night do you call this for turning respectable men out of their beds?"

"I didn't come for the pleasure o' seeing your pretty face again, you can bet," said the seaman carelessly. "It's good nature what's brought me here. What have you done with that diamond?"

"That's my business," said the other. "What do you want?"

"I told you I sailed in five days," said the seaman. "Well, I got another ship this evening instead, and I sail at 6 a.m. Things are getting just a bit too thick for me, an' I thought out o' pure good nature I'd step round and put you on your guard."

"Why didn't you do so at first?" said the Jew, eyeing him suspiciously.

"Well, I didn't want to spoil a bargain," said the seaman carelessly. "Maybe, you wouldn't have bought the stone if I had told you. Mind that thing don't go off; I don't want to rob you. Point it the other way."

"There was four of us in that deal," he continued, after the other had complied with his request. "Me an' Jack Ball and Nosey Wheeler and a Burmese chap; the last I see o' Jack Ball he was quiet and peaceful, with a knife sticking in his chest. If I hadn't been a very careful man I'd have had one sticking in mine. If you ain't a very careful man, and do what I tell you, you'll have one sticking in yours."

"Speak a little more plainly," said the Jew. "Come into the parlour, I don't want the police to see a light in the shop."

"We stole it," said the seaman, as he followed the other into the little back parlour, "the four of us, from——"

"I don't want to know anything about that," interrupted the other hastily.

The sailor grinned approvingly, and continued: "Then me an' Jack being stronger than them, we took it from them two, but they got level with poor Jack. I shipped before the mast on a barque, and they came over by steamer and waited for me."

"Well, you're not afraid of them?" said the Jew interrogatively. "Besides, a word to the police——"

"Telling 'em all about the diamond," said the seaman. "Oh, yes. Well, you can do that now if you feel so inclined. They know all about *that*, bless you, and, if they were had, they'd blab about the diamond."

"Have they been dogging you?" inquired the pawnbroker.

"Dogging me!" said the seaman. "Dogging's no word for it. Wherever I've been they've been my shadders. They want to hurt me, but they're careful about being hurt themselves. That's where I have the pull of them. They want the stone back first, and revenge afterwards, so I thought I'd put you on your guard, for they pretty well guess who's got the thing now. You'll know Wheeler by his nose, which is broken."

"I'm not afraid of them," said the Jew, "but thank you for telling me. Did they follow you here?"

"They're outside, I've no doubt," said the other; "but they come along like human cats—leastways, the Burmah chap does. You want eyes in the back of your head for them almost. The Burmese is an old man and soft as velvet, and Jack Ball just afore he died was going to tell me something about him. I don't know what it was; but, poor Jack, he was a superstitious sort o' chap, and I know it was something horrible. He was as brave as a lion, was Jack, but he was afraid o' that little shrivelled-up Burmese. They'll follow me to the ship to-night. If they'll only come close enough, and there's nobody nigh, I'll do Jack a good turn."

"Stay here till the morning," said the Jew.

The seaman shook his head. "I don't want to miss my ship," said he; "but remember what I've told you, and mind, they're villains, both of them, and if you are not very careful, they'll have you, sooner or later. Good-night!"

He buttoned up his coat, and leading the way to the door, followed by the Jew with the candle, opened it noiselessly, and peered carefully out right and left. The alley was empty.

"Take this," said the Jew, proffering his pistol.

"I've got one," said the seaman. "Good-night!"

He strode boldly up the alley, his footsteps sounding loudly in the silence of the night. The Jew watched him to the corner, and then, closing the door, secured it with extra care, and went back to his bedroom, where he lay meditating upon

the warning which had just been given to him until he fell asleep.

Before going downstairs next morning he placed the revolver in his pocket, not necessarily for use, but as a demonstration of the lengths to which he was prepared to go. His manner with two or three inoffensive gentlemen of colour was also somewhat strained. Especially was this the case with a worthy Lascar, who, knowing no English, gesticulated cheerfully in front of him with a long dagger which he wanted to pawn.

The morning passed without anything happening, and it was nearly dinner-time before anything occurred to justify the sailor's warning. Then, happening to glance at the window, he saw between the articles which were hanging there a villainous face, the principal feature of which being strangely bent at once recalled the warning of the sailor. As he looked the face disappeared, and a moment later its owner, after furtively looking in at the side door, entered quietly.

"Morning, boss," said he.

The pawnbroker nodded and waited.

"I want to have a little talk with you, boss," said the man, after waiting for him to speak.

"All right, go on," said the other.

"What about 'im?" said the man, indicating the assistant with a nod.

"Well, what about him?" inquired the Jew.

"What I've got to say is private," said the man.

The Jew raised his eyebrows.

"You can go in and get your dinner, Bob," he said. "Now, what do you want?" he continued. "Hurry up, because I'm busy."

"I come from a pal o' mine," said the man speaking in a low voice, "him what was 'ere last night. He couldn't come himself, so he sent me. He wants it back."

"Wants what back?" asked the Jew.

"The diamond," said the other.

"Diamond? What on earth are you talking about?" demanded the pawnbroker.

"You needn't try to come it on me," said the other fiercely. "We want that diamond back, and, mind you, we'll have it."

"You clear out," said the Jew. "I don't allow people to come threatening me. Out you go."

"We'll do more than threaten you," said the man, the veins in his forehead swelling with rage. "You've got that diamond. You got it for five 'undred pound. We'll give you that back for it, and you may think yourself lucky to get it."

"You've been drinking," said the Jew, "or somebody's been fooling you."

"Look here," said the man with a snarl, "drop it. I'm dealing fair an' square by you. I don't want to hurt a hair of your head. I'm a peaceable man, but I want my own, and, what's more, I can get it. I got the shell, and I can get the kernel. Do you know what I mean by that?"

"I don't know, and I don't care," said the Jew. He moved off a little way, and, taking some tarnished spoons from a box, began to rub them with a piece of leather.

"I daresay you can take a hint as well as anybody else," said the other. "Have you seen that before?"

He threw something on the counter, and the Jew started, despite himself, as he glanced up. *It was the sailor's belt.*

"That's a hint," said the man with a leer, "and a very fair one."

The Jew looked at him steadily, and saw that he was white and nervous; his whole aspect that of a man who was running a great risk for a great stake.

"I suppose," he said at length, speaking very slowly, "that you want me to understand that you have murdered the owner of this."

"Understand what you like," said the other with sullen ferocity. "Will you let us have that back again?"

"No," said the Jew explosively. "I have no fear of a dog like you; if it was worth the trouble I'd send for the police and hand you over to them."

"Call them," said the other; "do; I'll wait. But, mark my words, if you don't give us the stone back you're a dead man. I've got a pal what half that diamond belongs to. He's from the East, and a bad man to cross. He has only got to wish it, and you're a dead man without his raising a finger at you. I've come here to do you a good turn; if he comes here it's all up with you."

"Well, you go back to him," jeered the Jew; "a clever man like that can get the diamond without going near it seemingly. You're wasting your time here, and it's a pity; you must have got a lot of friends."

"Well, I've warned you," said the other, "you'll have one more warning. If you won't be wise you must keep the diamond, but it won't be much good to you. It's a good stone, but, speaking for myself, I'd sooner be alive without it than dead with it."

He gave the Jew a menacing glance and departed, and the assistant having by this time finished his dinner, the pawnbroker went to his own with an appetite by no means improved by his late interview.

CHAPTER III

THE cat, with its fore-paws tucked beneath it, was dozing on the counter. Business had been slack that morning, and it had only been pushed off three times. It had staked out a claim on that counter some five years before, and if anything was required to convince it of the value of the possession it was the fact that it was being constantly pushed off. To a firm-minded cat this alone gave the counter a value difficult to over-estimate, and sometimes an obsequious customer fell into raptures over its beauty. This was soothing, and the animal allowed customers of this type to scratch it gently behind the ear.

The cat was for the time the only occupant of the shop. The assistant was out, and the pawnbroker sat in the small room beyond, with the door half open, reading a newspaper. He had read the financial columns, glanced at the foreign intelligence, and was just about to turn to the leader when his eye was caught by the headline, "Murder in Whitechapel."

He folded the paper back, and, with a chilly feeling creeping over him, perused the account. In the usual thrilling style it recorded the finding of the body of a man, evidently a sailor, behind a hoarding placed in front of some shops in course of erection. There was no clue to the victim, who had evidently been stabbed from behind in the street, and then dragged or carried to the place in which the body had been discovered.

The pockets had been emptied, and the police, who regarded the crime as an ordinary one of murder and robbery, entertained the usual hopes of shortly arresting the assassins.

The pawnbroker put the paper down, and drummed on the table with his fingers. The description of the body left no room for doubt that the victim of the tragedy and the man who had sold him the diamond were identical. He began to realise the responsibilities of the bargain, and the daring of his visitor of the day before, in venturing before him almost red-handed, gave him an unpleasant idea of the lengths to which he was prepared to go. In a pleasanter direction it gave him another idea; it was strong confirmation of Levi's valuation of the stone.

"I shall see my friend again," said the Jew to himself, as he looked up from the paper. "Let him make an attempt on me and we'll see."

He threw the paper down, and, settling back in his chair, fell into a pleasing reverie. He saw his release from sordid toil close at hand. He would travel and enjoy his life. Pity the diamond hadn't come twenty years before. As for the

sailor, well, poor fellow, why didn't he stay when he was asked?

The cat, still dozing, became aware of a strong strange odour. In a lazy fashion it opened one eye, and discovered than an old, shrivelled up little man, with a brown face, was standing by the counter. It watched him lazily, but warily, out of a half closed eye, and then, finding that he appeared to be quite harmless, closed it again.

The intruder was not an impatient type of customer. He stood for some time gazing round him; then a thought struck him, and he approached the cat and stroked it with a masterly hand. Never, in the course of its life, had the animal met such a born stroker. Every touch was a caress, and a gentle thrum, thrum rose from its interior in response.

Something went wrong with the stroker. He hurt. The cat started up suddenly and jumped behind the counter. The dark gentleman smiled an evil smile, and, after waiting a little longer, tapped on the counter.

The pawnbroker came from the little room beyond, with the newspaper in his hand, and his brow darkened as he saw the customer. He was of a harsh and dominant nature, and he foresaw more distasteful threats.

"Well, what do you want?" he demanded abruptly.

"Morning, sir," said the brown man in perfect English; "fine day."

"The day's well enough," said the Jew.

"I want a little talk with you," said the other suavely, "a little quiet, reasonable talk."

"You'd better make it short," said the Jew. "My time is valuable."

The brown man smiled, and raised his hand with a deprecatory gesture. "Many things are valuable," said he, "but time is the most valuable of all. And time to us means life."

The Jew saw the covert threat, and grew more irritable still.

"Get to your business," he said sharply.

The brown man leant on the counter, and regarded him with a pair of fierce, brown eyes, which age had not dimmed.

"You are a reasonable man," he said slowly, "a good merchant. I can see it. But sometimes a good merchant makes a bad bargain. In that case what does the good merchant do?"

"Get out of here," said the Jew angrily.

"He makes the best of it," continued the other calmly, "and he is a lucky man if he is not too late to repair the mischief. *You are not too late.*"

The Jew laughed boisterously.

"There was a sailor once made a bad bargain," said the brown man, still in the same even tones, "and he died—of grief."

He grinned at this pleasantry until his face looked like a cracked mask.

"I read in this paper of a sailor being killed," said the Jew, holding it up. "Have you ever heard of the police, of prison, and of the hangman?"

"All of them," said the other softly.

"I might be able to put the hangman on the track of the sailor's murderer," continued the Jew grimly.

The brown man smiled and shook his head. "You are too good a merchant," he said; "besides, it would be very difficult."

"It would be a pleasure to me," said the Jew.

"Let us talk business like men, not nonsense like children," said the brown man suddenly. "You talk of hangmen. I talk of death. Well, listen. Two nights ago you bought a diamond from a sailor for five hundred pounds. Unless you give me that diamond back for the same money I will kill you."

"What?" snarled the Jew, drawing his gaunt figure to its full height. "You, you miserable mummy?"

"I will kill you," repeated the brown man calmly. "I will send death to you—death in a horrible shape. I will send a devil, a little artful, teasing devil, to worry you and kill you. In the darkness he will come and spring out on you. You had better give back the diamond, and live. If you give it back I promise you your life."

He paused, and the Jew noticed that his face had changed, and in place of the sardonic good-humour which had before possessed it, was now distorted by a devilish malice. His eyes gleamed coldly, and he snapped them quickly as he spoke.

"Well, what do you say?" he demanded.

"This," said the Jew.

He leant over the counter, and, taking the brown man's skinny throat in his great hand, flung him reeling back to the partition, which shook with his weight. Then he burst into a laugh as the being who had just been threatening him with a terrible and mysterious death changed into a little weak old man, coughing and spitting as he clutched at his throat and fought for breath.

"What about your servant, the devil?" asked the Jew maliciously.

"He serves when I am absent," said the brown man faintly. "Even now I give you one more chance. I will let you see the young fellow in your shop die first. But no, he has not offended. I will kill——"

He paused, and his eye fell on the cat, which at that moment sprang up and took its old place on the counter. "I will kill your cat," said the brown man. "I will send the devil to worry it. Watch the cat, and as its death is so shall yours be—unless——"

"Unless?" said the Jew, regarding him mockingly.

"Unless to-night before ten o'clock you mark on your door-post two crosses in chalk," said the other. "Do that and live. Watch your cat."

He pointed his lean, brown finger at the animal, and, still feeling at his throat, stepped softly to the door and passed out.

With the entrance of other customers, the pawnbroker forgot the annoyance to which he had been subjected, and attended to their wants in a spirit made liberal by the near prospect of fortune. It was certain that the stone must be of great value. With that and the money he had made by his business, he would give up work and settle down to a life of pleasant ease. So liberal was he that an elderly Irishwoman forgot their slight differences in creeds and blessed him fervently with all the saints in the calendar.

His assistant being back in his place in the shop, the pawnbroker returned to the little sitting-room, and once more carefully looked through the account of the sailor's murder. Then he sat still trying to work out a problem; to hand the murderers over to the police without his connection with the stolen diamond being made public, and, after considerable deliberation, convinced himself that the feat was impossible.

He was interrupted by a slight scuffling noise in the shop, and the cat came bolting into the room, and, after running round the table, went out at the door and fled upstairs. The assistant came into the room.

"What are you worrying the thing for?" demanded his master.

"I'm not worrying it," said the assistant in an aggrieved voice. "Its been moving about up and down the shop, and then it suddenly started like that. It's got a fit, I suppose."

He went back to the shop, and the Jew sat in his chair half ashamed of his nervous credulity, listening to the animal, which was rushing about in the rooms upstairs.

"Go and see what's the matter with the thing, Bob," he cried.

The assistant obeyed, returning hastily in a minute or two, and closing the door behind him.

"Well, what's the matter?" demanded his master.

"The brute's gone mad," said the assistant, whose face was white. "It's flying about upstairs like a wild thing. Mind it don't get in, it's as bad as a mad dog."

"Oh, rubbish," said the Jew. "Cats are often like that."

"Well, I've never seen one like it before," said the other, "and, what's more, I'm not going to see that again."

The animal came downstairs, scuffling along the passage, hit the door with its head, and then dashed upstairs again.

"It must have been poisoned, or else it's mad," said the assistant. "What's it been eating, I wonder?"

The pawnbroker made no reply. The suggestion of poisoning was a welcome one. It was preferable to the sinister hintings of the brown man. But even if it had been poisoned it was a very singular coincidence, unless indeed the Burmese had himself poisoned it. He tried to think whether it could have been possible for his visitor to have administered poison undetected.

"It's quiet now," said the assistant, and he opened the door a little way.

"It's all right," said the pawnbroker, half ashamed of his fears, "get back to the shop."

The assistant complied, and the Jew, after sitting down a little while to persuade himself that he really had no particular interest in the matter, rose and went slowly upstairs. The staircase was badly lighted, and half way up he stumbled on something soft. He gave a hasty exclamation and, stooping down, saw that he had trodden on the dead cat.

CHAPTER IV

At ten o'clock that night the pawnbroker sat with his friend Levi discussing a bottle of champagne, which the open-eyed assistant had procured from the public-house opposite.

"You're a lucky man, Hyams," said his friend, as he raised his glass to his lips. "Thirty thousand pounds! It's a fortune, a small fortune," he added correctively.

"I shall give this place up," said the pawnbroker, "and go away for a time. I'm not safe here."

"Safe?" queried Levi, raising his eyebrows.

The pawnbroker related his adventures with his visitors.

"I can't understand that cat business," said Levi when he had finished. "It's quite farcical; he must have poisoned it."

"He wasn't near it," said the pawnbroker, "it was at the other end of the counter."

"Oh, hang it," said Levi, the more irritably because he could not think of any solution to the mystery. "You don't believe in occult powers and all that sort of thing. This is the neighbourhood of the Commercial Road; time, nineteenth century. The thing's got on your nerves. Keep your eyes

open, and stay indoors; they can't hurt you here. Why not tell the police?"

"I don't want any questions," said the pawnbroker.

"I mean, just tell them that one or two suspicious characters have been hanging round lately," said the other. "If this precious couple see that they are watched they'll probably bolt. There's nothing like a uniform to scare that sort."

"I won't have anything to do with the police," said the pawnbroker firmly.

"Well, let Bob sleep on the premises," suggested his friend.

"I think I will to-morrow," said the other. "I'll have a bed fixed up for him."

"Why not to-night?" asked Levi.

"He's gone," said the pawnbroker briefly. "Didn't you hear him shut up?"

"He was in the shop five minutes ago," said Levi.

"He left at ten," said the pawnbroker.

"I'll swear I heard somebody only a minute or two back," said Levi, staring.

"Nerves, as you remarked a little while ago," said his friend, with a grin.

"Well, I thought I heard him," said Levi. "You might just secure the door, anyway."

The pawnbroker went to the door and made it fast, giving a careless glance round the dimly-lighted shop as he did so.

"Perhaps you could stay to-night yourself," he said, as he returned to the sitting-room.

"I can't possibly, to-night," said the other. "By the way, you might lend me a pistol of some kind. With all these cut-throats hanging round, visiting you is a somewhat perilous pleasure. They might take it into their heads to kill me to see whether I have got the stone."

"Take your pick," said the pawnbroker, going to the shop and returning with two or three secondhand revolvers and some cartridges.

"I never fired one in my life," said Levi dubiously, "but I believe the chief thing is to make a bang. Which'll make the loudest?"

On his friend's recommendation he selected a revolver of the service pattern, and, after one or two suggestions from the pawnbroker, expressed himself as qualified to shoot anything between a chimney-pot and a paving-stone.

"Make your room-door fast to-night, and to-morrow let Bob have a bed there," he said earnestly, as he rose to go.

"By the way, why not make those chalk marks on the door just for the night? You can laugh at them to-morrow. Sort of suggestion of the Passover about it, isn't there?"

"I'm not going to mark my door for all the assassins that ever breathed," said the Jew fiercely, as he rose to see the other out.

"Well, I think you're safe enough in the house," said Levi. "Beastly dreary the shop looks. To a man of imagination like myself it's quite easy to fancy that there is one of your brown friend's pet devils crouching under the counter ready to spring."

The pawnbroker grunted and opened the door.

"Poof, fog," said Levi, as a cloud streamed in. "Bad night for pistol practice. I shan't be able to hit anything."

The two men stood in the doorway for a minute, trying to peer through the fog. A heavy, measured tread sounded in the alley; a huge figure loomed up, and, to the relief of Levi, a constable halted before them.

"Thick night, sir," said he to the pawnbroker.

"Very," was the reply. "Just keep your eye on my place to-night, constable. There have been one or two suspicious-looking characters hanging about here lately."

"I will, sir," said the constable, and moved off in company with Levi.

The pawnbroker closed the door hastily behind them and bolted it securely. His friend's jest about the devil under the counter occurred to him as he eyed it, and for the first time in his life the lonely silence of the shop became oppressive. He half thought of opening the door again and calling them back, but by this time they were out of earshot, and he had a very strong idea that there might be somebody lurking in the fog outside.

"Bah!" said he aloud, "thirty thousand pounds."

He turned the gas-jet on full—a man that had just made that sum could afford to burn a little gas—and, first satisfying himself by looking under the counter and round the shop, re-entered the sitting-room.

Despite his efforts, he could not get rid of the sense of loneliness and danger which possessed him. The clock had stopped, and the only sound audible was the snapping of the extinguished coals in the grate. He crossed over to the mantelpiece, and, taking out his watch, wound the clock up. Then he heard something else.

With great care he laid the key softly on the mantelpiece and listened intently. The clock was now aggressively audible, so that he opened the case again, and putting his finger against the pendulum, stopped it. Then he drew his revolver and cocked it, and, with his set face turned towards the door, and his lips parted, waited.

At first—nothing. Then all the noises which a lonely man hears in a house at night. The stairs creaked, something moved in the walls. He crossed noiselessly to the door and opened it. At the head of the staircase he fancied the darkness moved.

"Who's there?" he cried in a strong voice.

Then he stepped back into the room and lit his lamp. "I'll get to bed," he said grimly; "I've got the horrors."

He left the gas burning, and with the lamp in his left hand and the pistol in his right slowly ascended the stairs. The first landing was clear. He opened the doors of each room, and, holding the lamp aloft, peered in. Then he mounted higher, and looked in the rooms, crammed from floor to ceiling with pledges, ticketed and placed on shelves. In one room he thought he saw something crouching in a corner. He entered boldly, and as he passed along one side of a row of shelves could have sworn that he heard a stealthy footfall on the other. He rushed back to the door, and hung listening over the shaky balusters. Nothing stirred, and, satisfied that he must have been mistaken, he gave up the search and went to his bedroom. He set the lamp down on the drawers, and turned to close the door, when he distinctly heard a noise in the shop below. He snatched up the lamp again and ran hastily downstairs, pausing half-way on the lowest flight as he saw a dark figure spreadeagled against the side door, standing on tip-toe to draw back the bolt.

At the noise of his approach, it turned its head hastily, and revealed the face of the brown man; the bolt shot back, and at the same moment the Jew raised his pistol and fired twice.

From beneath the little cloud of smoke, as it rose, he saw that the door stood open and that the figure had vanished. He ran hastily down to the door, and, with the pistol raised, stood listening, trying to peer through the fog.

An unearthly stillness followed the deafening noise of the shots. The fog poured in at the doorway as he stood there hoping that the noise had reached the ears of some chance passer-by. He stood so for a few minutes, and then, closing the door again, resolutely turned back and went upstairs.

His first proceeding upon entering his room was to carefully look beneath and behind the heavy, dusty pieces of furniture, and, satisfied that no foe lurked there, he closed the door and locked it. Then he opened the window gently, and listened. The court below was perfectly still. He closed the window, and, taking off his coat, barricaded the door with all the heaviest furniture in the room. With a feeling of perfect security, he complacently regarded his handiwork,

and then, sitting on the edge of the bed, began to undress. He turned the lamp down a little, and reloading the empty chambers of his revolver, placed it by the side of the lamp on the drawers. Then, as he turned back the clothes, he fancied that something moved beneath them. As he paused, it dropped lightly from the other side of the bed to the floor.

At first he sat, with knitted brows, trying to see what it was. He had only had a glimpse of it, but he certainly had an idea that it was alive. A rat perhaps. He got off the bed again with an oath, and, taking the lamp in his hand, peered cautiously about the floor. Twice he walked round the room in this fashion. Then he stooped down, and, raising the dirty bed hangings, peered beneath.

He almost touched the wicked little head of the brown man's devil, and, with a stifled cry, sprang hastily backward. The lamp shattered against the corner of the drawers, and falling in a shower of broken glass and oil about his stockinged feet, left him in darkness. He threw the fragment of glass stand which remained in his hand from him, and, quick as thought, gained the bed again, and crouched there, breathing heavily.

He tried to think where he had put the matches, and remembered there were some on the window-sill. The room was so dark that he could not see the foot of the bed, and in his fatuity he had barricaded himself in the room with the loathesome reptile which was to work the brown man's vengeance.

For some time he lay listening intently. Once or twice he fancied that he heard the rustle of the snake over the dingy carpet, and he wondered whether it would attempt to climb on to the bed. He stood up, and tried to get his revolver from the drawers. It was out of reach, and as the bed creaked beneath his weight, a faint hiss sounded from the floor, and he sat still again, hardly daring to breathe.

The cold rawness of the room chilled him. He cautiously drew the bed-clothes towards him, and rolled himself up in them, leaving only his head and arms exposed. In this position he began to feel more secure, until the thought struck him that the snake might be inside them. He fought against this idea, and tried to force his nerves into steadiness. Then his fears suggested that two might have been placed in the bed. At this his fears got the upper hand, and it seemed to him that something stirred in the clothes. He drew his body from them slowly and stealthily, and taking them in his arms, flung them violently to the other end of the room. On his hands and knees he now travelled over the bare bed, feeling. There was nothing there.

In this state of suspense and dread time seemed to stop.

Several times he thought that the thing had got on the bed, and to stay there in suspense in the darkness was impossible, He felt it over again and again. At last, unable to endure it any longer, he resolved to obtain the matches, and stepped cautiously off the bed; but no sooner had his feet touched the floor than his courage forsook him, and he sprang hurriedly back to his refuge again.

After that, in a spirit of dogged fatalism, he sat still and waited. To his disordered mind it seemed that footsteps were moving about the house, but they had no terrors for him. To grapple with a man for life and death would be play; to kill him, joy unspeakable. He sat still, listening. He heard rats in the walls and a babble of jeering voices on the staircase. The whole blackness of the room with the devilish, writhing thing on the floor became invested with supernatural significance. Then, dimly at first, and hardly comprehending the joy of it, he saw the window. A little later he saw the outlines of the things in the room. The night had passed and he was alive!

He raised his half-frozen body to its full height, and, expanding his chest, planted his feet firmly on the bed, stretching his long body to the utmost. He clenched his fist, and felt strong. The bed was unoccupied except by himself. He bent down and scrutinised the floor for his enemy, and set his teeth as he thought how he would tear it and mangle it. It was light enough, but first he would put on his boots. He leant over cautiously, and lifting one on to the bed, put it on. Then he bent down and took up the other, and, swift as lightning, something issued from it and, coiling round his wrist, ran up the sleeve of his shirt.

With starting eyeballs the Jew held his breath, and, stiffened into stone, waited helplessly. The tightness round his arm relaxed as the snake drew the whole of its body under the sleeve and wound round his arm. He felt its head moving. It came wriggling across his chest, and, with a mad cry, the wretched man clutched at the front of his shirt with both hands and strove to tear it off. He felt the snake in his hands, and for a moment hoped. Then the creature got its head free, and struck him smartly in the throat.

The Jew's hold relaxed, and the snake fell at his feet. He bent down and seized it, careless now that it bit his hand, and, with bloodshot eyes, dashed it repeatedly on the rail of the bed. Then he flung it to the floor, and, raising his heel, smashed its head to pulp.

His fury passed, he strove to think, but his brain was in a whirl. He had heard of sucking the wound, but one puncture was in his throat, and he laughed discordantly. He had heard that death had been prevented by drinking heavily

of spirits. He would do that first, and then obtain medical assistance.

He ran to the door, and began to drag the furniture away. In his haste the revolver fell from the drawers to the floor. He looked at it steadily for a moment, and then, taking it up, handled it wistfully. He began to think more clearly, although a numbing sensation was already stealing over him.

"Thirty thousand pounds!" he said slowly, and tapped his cheek lightly with the cold barrel.

Then he slipped it in his mouth, and pulling the trigger, crashed heavily to the floor.

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CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
I.		9
II.		14
III.		21
IV.		26
V.		32
VI.		39
VII.		49
VIII.		56
IX.		64
X.		71
XI.		79
XII.		86
XIII.		92
XIV.		99
XV.		105
XVI.		112
XVII.		119
XVIII.		125
XIX.		132
XX.		138
XXI.		144
XXII.		150
XXIII.		157
XXIV.		162
XXV.		169

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

THE GREAT THING WAS TO GET TEDDY SILK HOME ... *Frontispiece*

Facing Page

A PARTICULARLY HARD NUT 28

HE REGARDED THE WIFE OF HIS BOSOM WITH A CALCULATING GLANCE 63

HE FINISHED THE EVENING AT "THE CHEQUERS" 94

"YOU KEEP ON, NUGENT—DON'T YOU MIND 'IM!" 103

A POPULAR HERO 118

BELLA, IN A STATE OF FEARSOME GLEE, CAME DOWN THE GARDEN TO TELL THE CAPTAIN OF HIS VISITOR 127

MR. KYBIRD AND HIS OLD FRIEND PARTED 158

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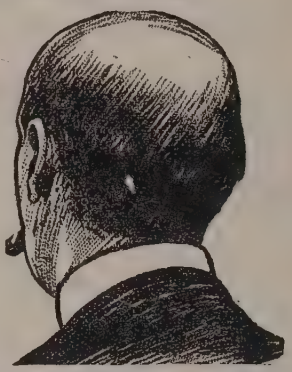

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AT SUNWICH PORT

CHAPTER I.

THE ancient port of Sunwich was basking in the sunshine of a July afternoon. A rattle of cranes and winches sounded from the shipping in the harbour, but the town itself was half asleep. Somnolent shop-keepers in dim back parlours coyly veiled their faces in red handkerchiefs from the too ardent flies, while small boys left in charge noticed listlessly the slow passing of time as recorded by the church clock.

It is a fine church, and Sunwich is proud of it. The tall grey tower is a landmark at sea, but from the narrow streets of the little town itself it has a disquieting appearance of rising suddenly above the roofs huddled beneath it for the purpose of displaying a black-faced clock with gilt numerals whose mellow chimes have recorded the passing hours for many generations of Sunwich men.

Regardless of the heat, which indeed was mild compared with that which raged in his own bosom, Captain Nugent, fresh from the inquiry of the collision of his ship *Conqueror* with the German barque *Hans Müller*, strode rapidly up the High Street in the direction of home. An honest seafaring smell, compounded of tar, rope, and fish, known to the educated of Sunwich as ozone, set his thoughts upon the sea. He longed to be aboard ship again, with the Court of Inquiry to form part of his crew. In all his fifty years of life he had never met such a collection of fools. His hard blue eyes blazed as he thought of them, and the mouth hidden by his well-kept beard was set with anger.

Mr. Samson Wilks, his steward, who had been with him to London to give evidence, had had a time upon which he looked back in later years with much satisfaction at his powers of endurance. He was with the captain, and yet not with him. When they got out of the train at Sunwich he hesitated as to whether he should follow the captain or leave him. His excuse for following was the bag, his reason for leaving the volcanic condition of its owner's temper, coupled with the fact that he appeared to be sublimely ignorant that the most devoted

steward in the world was tagging faithfully along a yard or two in the rear.

The few passers-by glanced at the couple with interest. Mr. Wilks had what is called an expressive face, and he had worked his sandy eyebrows, his weak blue eyes, and large, tremulous mouth into such an expression of surprise at the finding of the Court, that he had all the appearance of a beholder of visions. He changed the bag to his other hand as they left the town behind them, and regarded with gratitude the approaching end of his labours.

At the garden-gate of a fair-sized house some half-mile along the road the captain stopped, and after an impatient fumbling at the latch strode up the path, followed by Mr. Wilks, and knocked at the door. As he paused on the step he half turned, and for the first time noticed the facial expression of his faithful follower.

"What the deuce are you looking like that for?" he demanded.

"I've been surprised, sir," conceded Mr. Wilks; "surprised and astonished."

Wrath blazed again in the captain's eyes and set lines in his forehead. He was being pitied—by a steward!

"You've been drinking," he said, crisply; "put that bag down."

"Arsking your pardon, sir," said the steward, twisting his unusually dry lips into a smile, "but I've 'ad no opportunity, sir—I've been follerin' you all day, sir."

A servant opened the door.

"You've been soaking in it for a month," declared the captain as he entered the hall. "Why the blazes don't you bring that bag in? Are you so drunk you don't know what you are doing?"

Mr. Wilks picked the bag up and followed humbly into the house. Then he lost his head altogether, and gave some colour to his superior officer's charges by first cannoning into the servant and then wedging the captain firmly in the doorway of the sitting-room with the bag.

"Steward!" rasped the captain.

"Yessir," said the unhappy Mr. Wilks.

"Go and sit down in the kitchen, and don't leave this house till you're sober."

Mr. Wilks disappeared. He was not in his first lustre, but he was an ardent admirer of the sex, and in an

absent-minded way he passed his arm round the hand-maiden's waist, and sustained a buffet which made his head ring.

"A man o' your age, and drunk, too," explained the damsel.

Mr. Wilks denied both charges. It appeared that he was much younger than he looked, while, as for drink, he had forgotten the taste of it. A question as to the reception Ann would have accorded a boyish teetotaller remained unanswered.

In the sitting-room Mrs. Kingdom, the captain's widowed sister, put down her crochet-work as her brother entered, and turned to him expectantly. There was an expression of loving sympathy on her mild and rather foolish face, and the captain stiffened at once.

"I was in the wrong," he said, harshly, as he dropped into a chair; "my certificate has been suspended for six months, and my first officer has been commended."

"Suspended?" gasped Mrs. Kingdom, pushing back the white streamer to the cap which she wore in memory of the late Mr. Kingdom, and sitting upright. "You?"

"I think that's what I said," replied her brother.

Mrs. Kingdom gazed at him mournfully, and, putting her hand behind her, began a wriggling search in her pocket for a handkerchief, with the idea of paying a wholesome tribute of tears. She was a past master in the art of grief, and, pending its extraction, a docile tear hung on her eyelid and waited. The captain eyed her preparations with silent anger.

"I am not surprised," said Mrs. Kingdom, dabbing her eyes; "I expected it somehow. I seemed to have a warning of it. Something seemed to tell me; I couldn't explain, but I seemed to know."

She sniffed gently, and, wiping one eye at a time, kept the disengaged one charged with sisterly solicitude upon her brother. The captain, with steadily rising anger, endured this game of one-eyed peep-bo for five minutes; then he rose, and, muttering strange things in his beard, stalked upstairs to his room.

Mrs. Kingdom, thus forsaken, dried her eyes and resumed her work. The remainder of the family were in the kitchen ministering to the wants of a misunderstood steward, and, in return, extracting information which should render them independent of the captain's version.

"Was it very solemn, Sam?" inquired Miss Nugent, aged nine, who was sitting on the kitchen table.

Mr. Wilks used his hands and eyebrows to indicate the solemnity of the occasion.

"They even made the cap'n leave off speaking," he said, in an awed voice.

"I should have liked to have been there," said Master Nugent, dutifully.

"Ann," said Miss Nugent, "go and draw Sam a jug of beer."

"Beer, Miss?" said Ann.

"A jug of beer," repeated Miss Nugent, peremptorily.

Ann took a jug from the dresser, and Mr. Wilks, who was watching her, coughed helplessly. His perturbation attracted the attention of his hostess, and, looking round for the cause, she was just in time to see Ann disappearing into the larder with a cream-jug.

"The big jug, Ann," she said, impatiently; "you ought to know Sam would like a big one."

Ann changed the jugs, and, ignoring a mild triumph in Mr. Wilks' eye, returned to the larder, whence ensued a musical trickling. Then Miss Nugent, raising the jug with some difficulty, poured out a tumbler for the steward with her own fair hands.

"Sam likes beer," she said, speaking generally.

"I knew that the first time I see him, Miss," remarked the vindictive Ann.

Mr. Wilks drained his glass and set it down on the table again, making a feeble gesture of repulse as Miss Nugent refilled it.

"Go on, Sam," she said, with kindly encouragement; "how much does this jug hold, Jack?"

"Quart," replied her brother.

"How many quarts are there in a gallon?"

"Four."

Miss Nugent looked troubled.

"I heard father say he drinks gallons a day," she remarked; "you'd better fill all the jugs, Ann."

"It was only 'is way o' speaking," said Mr. Wilks, hurriedly; "the cap'n is like that sometimes."

"I knew a man once, Miss," said Ann, "as used to prefer to 'ave it in a wash-hand basin. Odd, ugly looking man 'e was; like Mr. Wilks in the face, only better looking."

Mr. Wilks sat upright, and, in the mental struggle involved in taking in this insult in all its ramifications, did not notice until too late that Miss Nugent had filled his glass again.

"It must ha' been nice for the captain to 'ave you with 'im to-day," remarked Ann, carelessly.

"It was," said Mr. Wilks, pausing with the glass at his lips and eyeing her sternly. "Eighteen years I've bin with 'im—ever since 'e 'ad a ship. 'E took a fancy to me the fust time 'e set eyes on me."

"Were you better-looking then, Sam?" inquired Miss Nugent, shuffling closer to him on the table and regarding him affectionately.

"Much as I am now, Miss," replied Mr. Wilks, setting down his glass and regarding Ann's giggles with a cold eye.

Miss Nugent sighed.

"I love you, Sam," she said, simply. "Will you have some more beer?"

Mr. Wilks declined gracefully.

"Eighteen years I've bin with the cap'n," he remarked, softly; "through calms and storms, fair weather and foul, Samson Wilks 'as been by 'is side, always ready in a quiet and 'umble way to do 'is best for 'im, and now—now that 'e is on his beam-ends and lost 'is ship, Samson Wilks'll sit down and starve ashore till he gets another."

At these touching words Miss Nugent was undisguisedly affected, and wiping her bright eyes with her pinafore, gave her small, well-shaped nose a slight touch *en passant* with the same useful garment, and squeezed his arm affectionately.

"It's a lively look-out for me if father is going to be at home for long," remarked Master Nugent. "Who'll get his ship, Sam?"

"Shouldn't wonder if the fust officer, Mr. Hardy, got it," replied the steward. "He was going dead-slow in the fog afore he sent down to rouse your father, and as soon as your father came on deck 'e went at 'arf-speed. Mr. Hardy was commended, and your father's certifikit was suspended for six months."

Master Nugent whistled thoughtfully, and quitting the kitchen proceeded upstairs to his room, and first washing himself with unusual care for a boy of thirteen, put on a clean collar and brushed his hair. He was not going to provide a suspended master-mariner with any obvious

reasons for fault-finding. While he was thus occupied the sitting-room bell rang, and Ann, answering it, left Mr. Wilks in the kitchen listening with some trepidation to the conversation.

"Is that steward of mine still in the kitchen?" demanded the captain, gruffly.

"Yessir," said Ann.

"What's he doing?"

Mr. Wilks' ears quivered anxiously, and he eyed with unwonted disfavour the evidences of his late debauch.

"Sitting down, sir," replied Ann.

"Give him a glass of ale and send him off," commanded the captain; "and if that was Miss Kate I heard talking, send her in to me."

Ann took the message back to the kitchen, and, with the air of a martyr engaged upon an unpleasant task, drew Mr. Wilks another glass of ale, and stood over him with well-affected wonder while he drank it. Miss Nugent walked into the sitting-room, and listening in a perfunctory fashion to a ship-master's platitudes on kitchen-company, took a seat on his knee and kissed his ear.

CHAPTER II.

The downfall of Captain Nugent was for some time a welcome subject of conversation in marine circles at Sunwich. At "The Goblets," a rambling old inn with paved courtyard and wooden galleries, which almost backed on to the churchyard, brother captains attributed it to an error of judgment; at the "Two Schooners" on the quay the profanest of sailormen readily attributed it to an all-seeing Providence with a dislike of overbearing ship-masters.

The captain's cup was filled to the brim by the promotion of his first officer to the command of the *Conqueror*. It was by far the largest craft which sailed from the port of Sunwich, and its master held a corresponding dignity amongst the captains of lesser vessels. Their allegiance was now transferred to Captain Hardy, and the master of a brig which was in the last stages of senile decay, meeting Nugent in "The Goblets,"

actually showed him by means of two lucifer matches how the collision might have been avoided.

A touching feature in the business, and a source of much gratification to Mr. Wilks by the sentimental applause evoked by it, was his renunciation of the post of steward on the ss. *Conqueror*. Sunwich buzzed with the tidings that after eighteen years' service with Captain Nugent he preferred starvation ashore to serving under another master. Although comfortable in pocket and known to be living with his mother, who kept a small general shop, he was regarded as a man on the brink of starvation. Pints were thrust upon him, and the tale of his nobility increased with much narration. It was considered that the whole race of stewards had acquired fresh lustre from his action.

His only unfavourable critic was the erring captain himself. He sent a peremptory summons to Mr. Wilks to attend at Equator Lodge, and the moment he set eyes upon that piece of probity embarked upon such a vilification of his personal defects and character as Mr. Wilks had never even dreamt of. He wound up by ordering him to join the ship forthwith.

"Arsking your pardon, sir," said Mr. Wilks, with tender reproach, "but I couldn't."

"Are you going to live on your mother, you hulking rascal?" quoth the incensed captain.

"No, sir," said Mr. Wilks. "I've got a little money, sir; enough for my few wants till we sail again."

"When I sail again you won't come with me," said the captain, grimly. "I suppose you want an excuse for a soak ashore for six months!"

Mr. Wilks twiddled his cap in his hands and smiled weakly.

"I thought p'r'aps as you'd like me to come round and wait at table, and help with the knives and boots and such-like," he said, softly. "Ann's agreeable."

"Get out of the house," said the captain, in quiet, measured tones.

Mr. Wilks went, but on his way to the gate he picked up three pieces of paper which had blown into the garden, weeded two pieces of grass from the path, and carefully removed a dead branch from a laurel facing the window. He would have done more but for an imperative knocking on the glass, and he left the premises sadly, putting his collection of rubbish over the next garden fence as he passed it.

But the next day the captain's boots bore such a polish that he was able to view his own startled face in them, and at dinner-time the brightness of the knives was so conspicuous that Mrs. Kingdom called Ann in for the purpose of asking her why she didn't always do them like that. Her brother ate his meal in silence, and going to his room afterwards discovered every pair of boots he possessed, headed by the tall sea-boots, standing in a nicely graduated line by the wall, and all shining their hardest.

For two days did Mr. Wilks do good by stealth, leaving Ann to blush to find it fame; but on the third day at dinner, as the captain took up his knife and fork to carve, he became aware of a shadow standing behind his chair. A shadow in a blue coat with metal buttons, which, whipping up the first plate carved, carried it to Mrs. Kingdom, and then leaned against her with the vegetable dishes. The dishes clattered a little on his arm as he helped the captain, but the latter, after an impressive pause and a vain attempt to catch the eye of Mr. Wilks, which was intent upon things afar off, took up the spoon and helped himself. From the unwonted silence of Miss Nugent in the presence of anything unusual, it was clear to him that the whole thing had been carefully arranged. He ate in silence, and a resolution to kick Mr. Wilks off the premises vanished before the comfort, to say nothing of the dignity, afforded by his presence. Mr. Wilks, somewhat reassured, favoured Miss Nugent with a wink to which, although she had devoted much time in trying to acquire the art, she endeavoured in vain to respond.

It was on the day following this that Jack Nugent, at his sister's instigation, made an attempt to avenge the family honour. Miss Nugent, although she treated him with scant courtesy herself, had a touching faith in his prowess, a faith partly due to her brother occasionally showing her his bicep muscles in moments of exaltation.

"There's that horrid Jem Hardy," she said, suddenly, as they walked along the road.

"So it is," said Master Nugent, but without any display of enthusiasm.

"Halloa, Jack." shouted Master Hardy across the road.

"Halloa," responded the other.

"He's going to fight you," shrilled Miss Nugent, who thought these amenities ill-timed; "he said so."

Master Hardy crossed the road.

"What for?" he demanded, with surprise.

"Because you're a nasty, horrid boy," replied Miss Nugent, drawing herself up.

"Oh!" said Master Hardy, blankly.

The two gentlemen stood regarding each other with uneasy grins; the lady stood by in breathless expectation. The suspense became painful.

"Who are you staring at?" demanded Master Nugent, at last.

"You," replied the other; "who are you staring at?"

"You," said Master Nugent, defiantly.

There was a long interval, both gentlemen experiencing some difficulty in working up sufficient heat for the engagement.

"You hit me and see what you'll get," said Master Hardy, at length.

"You hit me," said the other.

"Cowardy, cowardy custard," chanted the well-bred Miss Nugent, "ate his mother's mustard. Cowardy, cowardy cus——"

"Why don't you send that kid home?" demanded Master Hardy, eyeing the fair songster with strong disfavour.

"You leave my sister alone," said the other, giving him a light tap on the shoulder. "There's your coward's blow."

Master Hardy made a ceremonious return.

"There's yours," he said. "Let's go behind the church."

His foe assented, and they proceeded in grave silence to a piece of grass screened by trees, which stood between the church and the beach. Here they removed their coats and rolled up their shirt-sleeves. Things look different out-of-doors, and to Miss Nugent the arms of both gentlemen seemed somewhat stick-like in their proportions.

The preliminaries were awful, both combatants prancing round each other, with their faces just peering above their bent right arms, while their trusty lefts dealt vicious blows at the air. Miss Nugent turned pale and caught her breath at each blow, then she suddenly reddened with wrath as James Philip Hardy, having paid his tribute to science, began to hammer John Augustus Nugent about the face in a most painful and workmanlike fashion.

She hid her face for a moment, and when she looked again Jack was on the ground, and Master Hardy just rising from his prostrate body. Then Jack rose slowly, and, crossing over

to her, borrowed her handkerchief and applied it with great tenderness to his nose.

"Does it hurt, Jack?" she inquired, anxiously.

"No," growled her brother.

He threw down the handkerchief and turned to his opponent again; Miss Nugent, who was careful about her property, stooped to recover it, and immediately found herself involved in a twisting tangle of legs, from which she escaped by a miracle to see Master Hardy cuddling her brother round the neck with one hand and punching him as hard and as fast as he could with the other. The unfairness of it maddened her, and the next moment Master Hardy's head was drawn forcibly backwards by the hair. The pain was so excruciating that he released his victim at once, and Miss Nugent, emitting a series of terrified yelps, dashed off in the direction of home, her hair bobbing up and down on her shoulders, and her small black legs in an ecstasy of motion.

Master Hardy, with no very well-defined ideas of what he was going to do if he caught her, started in pursuit. His scalp was still smarting and his eyes watering with the pain as he pounded behind her. Panting wildly, she heard him coming closer and closer, and she was just about to give up when, to her joy, she saw her father coming towards them.

Master Hardy, intent on his quarry, saw him just in time, and, swerving into the road, passed in safety as Miss Nugent flung herself with some violence at her father's waistcoat, and, clinging to him convulsively, fought for breath. It was some time before she could furnish the astonished captain with full details, and she was pleased to find that his indignation led him to ignore the hair-grabbing episode, on which, to do her justice, she touched but lightly.

That evening, for the first time in his life, Captain Nugent, after some deliberation, called upon his late mate. The old servant who, since Mrs. Hardy's death the year before, had looked after the house, was out, and Hardy, unaware of the honour intended him, was scandalised by the manner in which his son received the visitor. The door opened, there was an involuntary grunt from Master Hardy, and the next moment he sped along the narrow passage and darted upstairs. His father, after waiting in vain for his return, went to the door himself.

"Good evening, cap'n," he said, in surprise.

Nugent responded gruffly, and followed him into the sitting-room. To an invitation to sit, he responded more gruffly still

that he preferred to stand. He then demanded instant and sufficient punishment of Master Hardy for frightening his daughter.

Even as he spoke he noticed with strong disfavour the change which had taken place in his late first officer. The change which takes place when a man is promoted from that rank to master is subtle, but unmistakable—sometimes, as in the present instance, more unmistakable than subtle. Captain Hardy coiled his long, sinewy form in an armchair and, eyeing him calmly, lit his pipe before replying.

"Boys will fight," he said, briefly.

"I'm speaking of his running after my daughter," said Nugent, sternly.

Hardy's eyes twinkled.

"Young dog," he said, genially; "at his age, too!"

Captain Nugent's face was suffused with wrath at the pleasantry, and he regarded him with a fixed stare. On board the *Conqueror* there was a witchery in that glance more potent than the spoken word, but in his own parlour the new captain met it calmly.

"I didn't come here to listen to your foolery," said Nugent. "I came to tell you to punish that boy of yours."

"And I shan't do it," replied the other. "I have got something better to do than interfere in children's quarrels. I haven't got your spare time, you know."

Captain Nugent turned purple. Such language from his late first officer was a revelation to him.

"I also came to warn you," he said, furiously, "that I shall take the law into my own hands if you refuse."

"Aye, aye," said Hardy, with careless contempt; "I'll tell him to keep out of your way. But I should advise you to wait until I have sailed."

Captain Nugent, who was moving towards the door, swung round and confronted him savagely.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"What I say," retorted Captain Hardy. "I don't want to indulge Sunwich with the spectacle of two middle-aged shipmasters at fisticuffs, but that's what'll happen if you touch my boy. It would probably please the spectators more than it would us."

"I'll cane him the first time I lay hands on him," roared Captain Nugent.

Captain Hardy's stock of patience was at an end. and

there was, moreover, a long and undischarged account between himself and his late skipper. He rose and crossed to the door.

"Jem," he cried, "come downstairs and show Captain Nugent out."

There was a breathless pause. Captain Nugent ground his teeth with fury as he saw the challenge, and realised the ridiculous position into which his temper had led him; and the other, who was also careful of appearances, repented the order the moment he had given it. Matters had now, however, passed out of their hands, and both men cast appraising glances at each other's form. The only one who kept his head was Master Hardy, and it was a source of considerable relief to both of them when, from the top of the stairs, the voice of that youthful Solomon was heard declining in the most positive terms to do anything of the kind.

Captain Hardy repeated his command. The only reply was the violent closing of a door at the top of the house, and after waiting a short time he led the way to the front door himself.

"You will regret your insolence before I have done with you," said his visitor, as he paused on the step. "It's the old story of a beggar on horseback."

"It's a good story," said Captain Hardy, "but to my mind it doesn't come up to the one about Humpty-Dumpty. Good-night."

CHAPTER III.

If anything was wanted to convince Captain Nugent that his action had been foolish and his language intemperate it was borne in upon him by the subsequent behaviour of Master Hardy. Generosity is seldom an attribute of youth, while egotism, on the other hand, is seldom absent. So far from realising that the captain would have scorned such lowly game, Master Hardy believed that he lived for little else, and his Jack-in-the-box ubiquity was a constant marvel and discomfort to that irritable mariner. Did he approach a seat on the beach, it was Master Hardy who rose (at the last moment) to make room for him. Did he stroll down to the harbour, it was in the wake of a small boy looking coyly at him over his shoulder. Every small alley as he passed seemed to contain a Jem Hardy, who whizzed out like a human firework in front of him, and then followed dancing on his toes a pace or two in his rear.

This was on week-days; on the Sabbath Master Hardy's daring ingenuity led him to still further flights. All the seats at the parish church were free, but Captain Nugent, whose admirable practice it was to take his entire family to church, never thoroughly realised how free they were until Master Hardy squeezed his way in, and, taking a seat next to him, prayed with unwonted fervour into the interior of a new hat, and then, sitting back, watched with polite composure the efforts of Miss Nugent's family to restrain her growing excitement.

Charmed with the experiment, he repeated it the following Sunday. This time he boarded the seat from the other end, and seeing no place by the captain, took one, or more correctly speaking made one, between Miss Nugent and Jack, and despite the former's elbow began to feel almost like one of the family.

Hostile feelings vanished, and with an amiable smile at the half-frantic Miss Nugent he placed a "bull's-eye" of great strength in his cheek, and leaning forward for a hymn-book left one on the ledge in front of Jack. A double-distilled perfume at once assailed the atmosphere.

Miss Nugent sat dazed at his impudence, and for the first time in her life doubts as to her father's capacity stirred within her. She attempted the poor consolation of an

"acid tablet," and it was at once impounded by the watchful Mrs. Kingdom. Meantime the reek of "bull's-eyes" was insufferable.

The service seemed interminable, and all that time the indignant damsel, wedged in between her aunt and the openly exultant enemy of her house, was compelled to endure in silence. She did indeed attempt one remark, and Master Hardy, with a horrified expression of outraged piety, said, "H'sh," and shook his head at her. It was almost more than flesh and blood could bear, and when the unobservant Mrs. Kingdom asked her for the text on the way home her reply nearly cost her the loss of her dinner.

The *Conqueror*, under its new commander, sailed on the day following. Mr. Wilks watched it from the quay, and the new steward observing him came to the side, and holding aloft an old pantry-cloth between his finger and thumb until he had attracted his attention, dropped it overboard with every circumstance of exaggerated horror. By the time a suitable retort had occurred to the ex-steward the steamer was half a mile distant, and the extraordinary and unnatural pantomime in which he indulged on the edge of the quay was grievously misinterpreted by a nervous man in a sailing-boat.

Master Hardy had also seen the ship out, and, perched on the extreme end of the breakwater, he remained watching until she was hull down on the horizon. Then he made his way back to the town and the nearest confectioner, and started for home just as Miss Nugent, who was about to pay a call with her aunt, waited, beautifully dressed, in the front garden while that lady completed her preparations.

Feeling very spick and span, and still a trifle uncomfortable from the vigorous attentions of Ann, who cleansed her as though she had been a doorstep, she paced slowly up and down the path. Upon these occasions of high dress a spirit of Sabbath calm was wont to descend upon her and save her from escapades to which in a less severe garb she was somewhat prone.

She stopped at the gate and looked up the road. Then her face flushed, and she cast her eyes behind her to make sure that the hall-door stood open. The hated scion of the house of Hardy was coming down the road, and, in view of that fact, she forgot all else—even her manners.

The boy, still fresh from the loss of his natural protector, kept a wary eye on the house as he approached. Then all

expression died out of his face, and he passed the gate, blankly ignoring the small girl who was leaning over it and apparently suffering from elephantiasis of the tongue. He went by quietly, and Miss Nugent, raging inwardly that she had misbehaved to no purpose, withdrew her tongue for more legitimate uses.

"Boo!" she cried; "who had his hair pulled?"

Master Hardy pursued the even tenor of his way.

"Who's afraid to answer me for fear my father will thrash him?" cried the disappointed lady, raising her voice.

This was too much. The enemy retraced his steps and came up to the gate.

"You're a rude little girl," he said, with an insufferably grown-up air.

"Who had his hair pulled?" demanded Miss Nugent, capering wildly; "who had his hair pulled?"

"Don't be silly," said Master Hardy. "Here."

He put his hand in his pocket, and, producing some nuts, offered them over the gate. At this Miss Nugent ceased her capering, and wrath possessed her that the enemy should thus misunderstand the gravity of the situation.

"Well, give 'em to Jack, then," pursued the boy; "he won't say no."

This was a distinct reflection on Jack's loyalty, and her indignation was not lessened by the fact that she knew it was true.

"Go away from our gate," she stormed. "If my father catches you, you'll suffer."

"Pooh!" said the dare-devil. He looked up at the house and then, opening the gate, strode boldly into the front garden. Before this intrusion Miss Nugent retreated in alarm, and gaining the doorstep gazed at him in dismay. Then her face cleared suddenly, and Master Hardy, looking over his shoulder, saw that his retreat was cut off by Mr. Wilks.

"Don't let him hurt me, Sam," entreated Miss Nugent, piteously.

Mr. Wilks came into the garden and closed the gate behind him.

"I wasn't going to hurt her," cried Master Hardy, anxiously; "as if I should hurt a girl!"

"Wot are you doing in our front garden, then?" demanded Mr. Wilks.

He sprang forward suddenly, and, catching the boy by the collar with one huge hand, dragged him, struggling violently, down the side entrance into the back garden. Miss Nugent, following close behind, sought to improve the occasion.

"See what you get by coming into our garden," she said.

The victim made no reply. He was writhing strenuously in order to frustrate Mr. Wilks's evident desire to arrange him comfortably for the administration of the stick he was carrying. Satisfied at last, the ex-steward raised his weapon, and for some seconds plied it briskly.

Miss Nugent trembled, but sternly repressing sympathy for the sufferer, was pleased that the long arm of justice had at last overtaken him.

"Let him go now, Sam," she said; "he's crying."

"I'm *not*," yelled Master Hardy, frantically.

"I can see the tears," declared Miss Nugent, bending.

Mr. Wilks plied the rod again, until his victim, with a sudden turn, fetched him a violent kick on the shin, and broke loose. The ex-steward set off in pursuit, somewhat handicapped by the fact that he dare not go over flower-beds, whilst Master Hardy was singularly free from such prejudices. Miss Nugent ran to the side entrance to cut off his retreat. She was willing for him to be released, but not to escape, and so it fell out that the boy, dodging beneath Mr. Wilks's outspread arms, charged blindly up the side entrance and bowled the young lady over. There was a shrill squeal, a flutter of white, and a neat pair of button boots waving in the air. Then Miss Nugent, sobbing piteously, rose from the puddle into which she had fallen and surveyed her garments. Mr. Wilks surveyed them, too, and a very cursory glance was sufficient to show him that the case was beyond his powers. He took the outraged damsel by the hand, and led her, howling lustily, in to the horrified Ann.

"My word!" said she, gasping. "Look at your gloves! Look at your frock!"

But Miss Nugent was looking at her knees. There was only a slight redness about the left, but from the right a piece of skin was indubitably missing. This knee she gave Ann instructions to foment with fair water of a comfortable temperature, indulging in satisfied prognostications as to the fate of Master Hardy when her father should see the damage.

The news, when the captain came home, was broken to him by degrees. He was first shown the flower-beds by Ann, then Mrs. Kingdom brought in various soiled garments, and at the psychological moment his daughter bared her knees.

"What will you do to him, father?" she inquired.

The captain ignored the question in favour of a few remarks on the subject of his daughter's behaviour, coupled with stern inquiries as to where she learnt such tricks. In reply, Miss Nugent sheltered herself behind a list which contained the names of all the young gentlemen who attended her kindergarten class and most of the young ladies, and again inquired as to the fate of her assailant.

Jack came in soon after, and the indefatigable Miss Nugent produced her knees again. She had to describe the injury to the left, but the right spoke for itself. Jack gazed at it with indignation, and then, without waiting for his tea, put on his cap and sallied out again.

He returned an hour later, and instead of entering the sitting-room went straight upstairs to bed, from whence he sent down word by the sympathetic Ann that he was suffering from a bad headache, which he proposed to treat with raw meat applied to the left eye. His nose, which was apparently suffering from sympathetic inflammation, he left to take care of itself, that organ bitterly resenting any treatment whatsoever.

He described the battle to Kate and Ann the next day, darkly ascribing his defeat to a mysterious compound which Jem Hardy was believed to rub into his arms; to a foolish error of judgment at the beginning of the fray, and to the sun, which shone persistently in his eyes all the time. His audience received the explanations in chilly silence.

"And he said it was an accident he knocked you down," he concluded; "he said he hoped you weren't hurt, and he gave me some toffee for you."

"What did you do with it?" demanded Miss Nugent.

"I knew you wouldn't have it," replied her brother, inconsequently, "and there wasn't much of it."

His sister regarded him sharply.

"You don't mean to say you ate it?" she screamed.

"Why not?" demanded her brother. "I wanted comforting, I can tell you."

"I wonder you were not too—too proud," said Miss Nugent, bitterly.

"I'm never too proud to eat toffee," retorted Jack, simply.

He stalked off in dudgeon at the lack of sympathy displayed by his audience, and being still in need of comforting, sought it amid the raspberry-canes.

His father noted his son's honourable scars, but made no comment. As to any action on his own part, he realised to the full the impotence of a law-abiding and dignified citizen when confronted by lawless youth. But Master Hardy came to church no more. Indeed, the following Sunday he was fully occupied on the beach, enacting the part of David, after first impressing the raving Mr. Wilks into that of Goliath.

CHAPTER IV.

For the next month or two Master Hardy's existence was brightened by the efforts of an elderly steward who made no secret of his intentions of putting an end to it. Mr. Wilks at first placed great reliance on the saw that "it is the early bird that catches the worm," but lost faith in it when he found that it made no provision for cases in which the worm, leaning from its bedroom window, addressed spirited remonstrances to the bird on the subject of its personal appearance.

To the anxious inquiries of Miss Nugent, Mr. Wilks replied that he was biding his time. Every delay, he hinted, made it worse for Master Hardy when the day of retribution should dawn; and although she pleaded earnestly for a little on account, he was unable to meet her wishes. Before that day came, however, Captain Nugent heard of the proceedings, and after a painful interview with the steward, during which the latter's failings by no means escaped attention, confined him to the house.

An excellent reason for absenting himself from school was thus denied to Master Hardy; but it has been well said that when one door closes another opens, and to his great satisfaction the old servant, who had been in poor health for some time, suddenly took to her bed and required his undivided attention.

He treated her at first with patent medicines purchased at

the chemist's, a doctor being regarded by both of them as a piece of unnecessary extravagance; but in spite of four infallible remedies she got steadily worse. Then a doctor was called in, and by the time Captain Hardy returned home she had made a partial recovery, but was clearly incapable of further work. She left in a cab to accept a home with a niece, leaving the captain confronted with a problem which he had seen growing for some time past.

"I can't make up my mind what to do with you," he observed, regarding his son.

"I'm very comfortable," was the reply.

"You're too comfortable," said his father. "You're running wild. It's just as well poor old Martha has gone; it has brought things to a head."

"We could have somebody else," suggested his son.

The captain shook his head.

"I'll give up the house and send you to London to your Aunt Mary," he said, slowly; "she doesn't know you, and once I'm at sea and the house given up, she won't be able to send you back."

Master Hardy, who was much averse to leaving Sunwich, and had heard accounts of the lady in question which referred principally to her strength of mind, made tender inquiries concerning his father's comfort while ashore.

"I'll take rooms," was the reply, "and I shall spend as much time as I can with you in London. You want looking after, my son; I've heard all about you."

His son, without inquiring as to the nature of the information, denied it at once upon principle; he also alluded darkly to his education, and shook his head over the effects of a change at such a critical period of his existence.

"And you talk too much for your age," was his father's comment when he had finished. "A year or two with your aunt ought to make a nice boy of you; there's plenty of room for improvement."

He put his plans in hand at once, and a week before he sailed again had disposed of the house. Some of the furniture he kept for himself; but the bulk of it went to his sister as conscience-money.

Master Hardy, in very low spirits, watched it taken away. Big men in hob-nailed boots ran noisily up the bare stairs, and came down slowly, steering large pieces of furniture through narrow passages, and using much vain repetition when they found their hands acting as fenders. The wardrobe, a piece

of furniture which had been built for larger premises, was a particularly hard nut to crack, but they succeeded at last—in three places.

A few of his intimates came down to see the last of him, and Miss Nugent, who in some feminine fashion regarded the move as a triumph for her family, passed by several times. It might have been chance, it might have been design, but the boy could not help noticing that when the piano, the wardrobe, and other fine pieces were being placed in the van, she was at the other end of the road, a position from which such curios as a broken washstand or a two-legged chair never failed to entice her.

It was over at last. The second van had disappeared, and nothing was left but a litter of straw and paper. The front door stood open and revealed desolation. Miss Nugent came to the gate and stared in superciliously.

"I'm glad you're going," she said, frankly.

Master Hardy scarcely noticed her. One of his friends, who concealed strong business instincts beneath a sentimental exterior, had suggested souvenirs, and given him a spectacle-glass said to have belonged to Henry VIII., and he was busy searching his pockets for an adequate return. Then Captain Hardy came up, and first going over the empty house, came out and bade his son accompany him to the station. A minute or two later and they were out of sight; the sentimentalist stood on the kerb gloating over a newly acquired penknife, and Miss Nugent, after being strongly reproved by him for curiosity, paced slowly home with her head in the air.

Sunwich made no stir over the departure of one of its youthful citizens. Indeed, it lacked not those who would have cheerfully parted with two or three hundred more. The boy was quite chilled by the tameness of his exit, and for years afterwards the desolate appearance of the platform as the train steamed out occurred to him with an odd sense of discomfort. In all Sunwich there was only one person who grieved over his departure, and he, after keeping his memory green for two years, wrote off fivepence as a bad debt and dismissed him from his thoughts.

Two months after the *Conqueror* had sailed again Captain Nugent obtained command of a steamer sailing between London and the Chinese ports. From the gratified lips of Mr. Wilks, Sunwich heard of this new craft, the particular glory of which appeared to be the luxurious appointments

A PARTICULARLY HARD NUT.

p. 28.

of the steward's quarters. Language, indeed, failed Mr. Wilks in describing it, and, pressed for details, he could only murmur disjointedly of satin-wood, polished brass, and crimson velvet.

Jack Nugent hailed his father's departure with joy. They had seen a great deal of each other during the latter's prolonged stay ashore, and neither had risen in the other's estimation in consequence. He became enthusiastic over the sea as a profession for fathers, and gave himself some airs over acquaintances less fortunately placed. In the first flush of liberty he took to staying away from school, the education thus lost being only partially atoned for by a grown-up style of composition engendered by dictating excuses to the easy-going Mrs. Kingdom.

At seventeen he learnt, somewhat to his surprise, that his education was finished. His father provided the information, and, simply as a matter of form, consulted him as to his views for the future. It was an important thing to decide upon at short notice, but he was equal to it, and, having suggested gold-digging as the only profession he cared for, was promptly provided by the incensed captain with a stool in the local bank.

He occupied it for three weeks, a period of time which coincided to a day with his father's leave ashore. He left behind him his initials cut deeply in the lid of his desk, a miscellaneous collection of cheap fiction, and a few experiments in book-keeping, which the manager ultimately solved with red ink and a ruler.

A slight uneasiness as to the wisdom of his proceedings occurred to him just before his father's return, but he comforted himself and Kate with the undeniable truth that after all the captain couldn't eat him. He was afraid, however, that the latter would be displeased, and, with a constitutional objection to unpleasantness, he contrived to be out when he returned, leaving to Mrs. Kingdom the task of breaking the news.

The captain's reply was brief and to the point. He asked his son whether he would like to go to sea, and upon receiving a decided answer in the negative, at once took steps to send him there. In two days he had procured him an outfit, and within a week Jack Nugent, greatly to his own surprise, was on the way to Melbourne as apprentice on the barque *Silver Stream*.

He liked it even less than the bank. The monotony of the

sea was appalling to a youth of his tastes, and the fact that the skipper, a man who never spoke except to find fault, was almost loquacious with him failed to afford him any satisfaction. He liked the mates no better than the skipper, and having said as much one day to the second officer, had no reason afterwards to modify his opinions. He lived a life apart, and except for the cook, another martyr to fault-finding, had no society.

In these uncongenial circumstances the new apprentice worked for four months as he had never believed it possible he could work. He was annoyed both at the extent and the variety of his tasks, the work of an A.B. being gratuitously included in his curriculum. The end of the voyage found him desperate, and after a hasty consultation with the cook they deserted together and went up-country.

Letters, dealing mainly with the ideas and adventures of the cook, reached Sunwich at irregular intervals, and were eagerly perused by Mrs. Kingdom and Kate, but the captain forbade all mention of him. Then they ceased altogether, and after a year or two of unbroken silence Mrs. Kingdom asserted herself, and a photograph in her possession, the only one extant, exposing the missing Jack in petticoats and sash, suddenly appeared on the drawing-room mantelpiece.

The captain stared, but made no comment. Disappointed in his son, he turned for consolation to his daughter, noting with some concern the unaccountable changes which that young lady underwent during his absences. He noticed a difference after every voyage. He left behind him on one occasion a nice trim little girl, and returned to find a creature all legs and arms. He returned again and found the arms less obnoxious and the legs hidden by a long skirt; and as he complained in secret astonishment to his sister, she had developed a motherly manner in her dealings with him which was almost unbearable.

"She'll grow out of it soon," said Mrs. Kingdom; "you wait and see."

The captain growled and waited, and found his sister's prognostications partly fulfilled. The exuberance of Miss Nugent's manner was certainly modified by time, but she developed instead a quiet, unassuming habit of authority which he liked as little.

"She gets made such a fuss of, it's no wonder," said Mrs. Kingdom, with a satisfied smile. "I never heard of a girl

getting as much attention as she does; it's a wonder her head isn't turned."

"Eh!" said the startled captain; "she'd better not let me see anything of it."

"Just so," said Mrs. Kingdom.

The captain dwelt on these words and kept his eyes open, and, owing to his daughter's benevolent efforts on his behalf, had them fully occupied. He went to sea firmly convinced that she would do something foolish in the matrimonial line, the glowing terms in which he had overheard her describing the charms of the new postman to Mrs. Kingdom filling him with the direst forebodings.

It was his last voyage. An unexpected windfall from an almost forgotten uncle and his own investments had placed him in a position of modest comfort, and just before Miss Nugent reached her twentieth birthday he resolved to spend his declining days ashore and give her those advantages of paternal attention from which she had been so long debarred.

Mr. Wilks, to the inconsolable grief of his shipmates, left with him. He had been for nearly a couple of years in receipt of an annuity purchased for him under the will of his mother, and his defection left a gap never to be filled among comrades who had for some time regarded him in the light of an improved drinking fountain.

CHAPTER V.

On a fine afternoon, some two months after his release from the toils of the sea, Captain Nugent sat in the special parlour of "The Goblets." The old inn offers hospitality to all, but one parlour has, by ancient tradition and the exercise of self-restraint and proper feeling, been from time immemorial reserved for the *élite* of the town.

The captain, confident in the security of these unwritten regulations, conversed freely with his peers. He had been moved to speech by the utter absence of discipline ashore, and from that had wandered to the growing evil of revolutionary ideas at sea. His remarks were much applauded, and two brother-captains listened with grave respect to a disquisition on the wrongs of shipmasters ensuing on the fancied rights of sailor-men, the only discordant note being struck by the harbour-master, a man whose ideas had probably been insidiously sapped by a long residence ashore.

"A man before the mast," said the latter, fortifying his moral courage with whisky, "is a human being."

"Nobody denies it," said Captain Nugent, looking round.

One captain agreed with him.

"Why don't they act like it, then?" demanded the other.

Nugent and the first captain, struck by the remark, thought they had perhaps been too hasty in their admission, and waited for number two to continue. They eyed him with silent encouragement.

"Why don't they act like it, then?" repeated number two, who, being a man of few ideas, was not disposed to waste them.

Captain Nugent and his friend turned to the harbour-master to see how he would meet this poser.

"They mostly do," he replied, sturdily. "Treat a seaman well, and he'll treat you well."

This was rank heresy, and moreover seemed to imply something. Captain Nugent wondered dismally whether life ashore would infect him with the same opinions.

"What about that man of mine who threw a belaying-pin at me?" he demanded.

The harbour-master quailed at the challenge. The obvious retort was offensive.

"I shall carry the mark with me to my grave," added the captain, as a further inducement to him to reply.

"I hope that you'll carry it a long time," said the harbour-master, gracefully.

"Here, look here, Hall!" expostulated captain number two starting up.

"It's all right, Cooper," said Nugent.

"It's all right," said captain number one, and in a rash moment undertook to explain. In five minutes he had clouded Captain Cooper's intellect for the afternoon.

He was still busy with his self-imposed task when a diversion was created by the entrance of a new arrival. A short, stout man stood for a moment with the handle of the door in his hand, and then came in, carefully bearing before him a glass of gin and water. It was the first time he had set foot there, and all understood that by this intrusion Mr. Daniel Kybird sought to place sea-captains and other dignitaries on a footing with the keepers of slop-shops and dealers in old clothes. In the midst of an impressive silence he set his glass upon the table and, taking a chair, drew a small clay pipe from his pocket.

Aghast at the intrusion, the quartette conferred with their eyes, a language which is perhaps only successful in love. Captain Cooper, who was usually moved to speech by externals, was the first to speak.

"You've got a sty coming on your eye, Hall," he remarked.

"I dare say."

"If anybody's got a needle——" said the captain, who loved minor operations.

Nobody heeded him except the harbour-master, and he muttered something about beams and motes, which the captain failed to understand. The others were glaring darkly at Mr. Kybird, who had taken up a newspaper and was busy perusing it.

"Are you looking for anybody?" demanded Captain Nugent, at last.

"No," said Mr. Kybird, looking at him over the top of his paper.

"What have you come here for, then?" inquired the captain.

"I come 'ere to drink two o' gin cold," returned Mr. Kybird, with a dignity befitting the occupation.

"Well, suppose you drink it somewhere else," suggested the captain.

Mr. Kybird had another supposition to offer.

"Suppose I don't?" he remarked. "I'm a respectable British tradesman, and my money is as good as yours. I've as much right to be here as you 'ave. I've never done anything I'm ashamed of!"

'And you never will," said Captain Cooper's friend, grimly, "not if you live to be a hundred."

Mr. Kybird looked surprised at the tribute.

"Thankee," he said, gratefully.

'Well, we don't want you here," said Captain Nugent. "We prefer your room to your company."

Mr. Kybird leaned back in his chair and twisted his blunt features into an expression of withering contempt. Then he took up a glass and drank, and discovered too late that in the excitement of the moment he had made free with the speaker's whisky.

"Don't apologise," interrupted the captain; "it's soon remedied."

He took the glass up gingerly and flung it with a crash into the fireplace. Then he rang the bell.

"I've smashed a dirty glass," he said, as the barman entered. "How much?"

The man told him, and the captain, after a few stern remarks about privacy and harpies, left the room with his friends, leaving the speechless Mr. Kybird gazing at the broken glass and returning evasive replies to the inquiries of the curious Charles.

He finished his gin and water slowly. For months he had been screwing up his courage to carry that room by assault, and this was the result. He had been insulted almost in the very face of Charles, a youth whose reputation as a gossip was second to none in Sunwich.

"Do you know what I should do if I was you?" said that worthy, as he entered the room again and swept up the broken glass.

"I do not," said Mr. Kybird, with lofty indifference.

"I shouldn't come 'ere again, that's what I should do," said Charles, frankly. "Next time he'll throw *you* in the fireplace."

"Ho," said the heated Mr. Kybird—"ho, will he? I'd like to see 'im. I'll make 'im sorry for this afore I've done with 'im. I'll learn 'im to insult a respectable British tradesman. I'll show him who's who."

"What'll you do?" inquired the other.

"Never you mind," said Mr. Kybird, who was not in a position to satisfy his curiosity—"never you mind. You go and get on with your work, Charles, and p'r'aps by the time your moustache 'as grown big enough to be seen you'll 'ear something."

"I 'eard something the other day," said the barman, musingly; "about you it was, but I wouldn't believe it."

"Wot was it?" demanded the other.

"Nothing much," replied Charles, standing with his hand on the door-knob, "but I wouldn't believe it of you; I said I couldn't."

"Wot—was—it?" insisted Mr. Kybird.

"Why, they said you once gave a man a fair price for a pair of trousers," said the barman, indignantly.

He closed the door behind him softly, and Mr. Kybird, after a brief pause, opened it again, and, more softly still, quitted the precincts of "The Goblets," and stepped across the road to his emporium.

Captain Nugent, in happy ignorance of the dark designs of the wardrobe dealer, had also gone home. He was only just beginning to realise the comparative unimportance of a retired shipmaster, and the knowledge was a source of considerable annoyance to him. No deferential mates listened respectfully to his instructions, no sturdy seamen ran to execute his commands or trembled mutinously at his wrath. The only person in the wide world who stood in awe of him was the general servant Bella, and she made no attempt to conceal her satisfaction at the attention excited by her shortcomings.

He paused a moment at the gate, and then, walking slowly up to the door, gave it the knock of a master. A full minute passing, he knocked again, remembering with some misgivings his stern instructions of the day before that the door was to be attended by the servant and by nobody else. He had seen Miss Nugent sitting at the window as he passed it, but in the circumstances the fact gave him no comfort. A third knock was followed by a fourth, and then a distressed voice upstairs was heard calling wildly upon the name of Bella.

At the fifth knock the house shook, and a red-faced maid, with her shoulders veiled in a large damp towel, passed hastily down the staircase, and, slipping the catch, passed more hastily still upstairs again, affording the indignant captain a glimpse of a short striped skirt as it turned the landing.

"Is there any management at all in this house?" he inquired, as he entered the room.

"Bella was dressing," said Miss Nugent, calmly, "and you gave orders yesterday that nobody else was to open the door."

"Nobody else when she's available," qualified her father, eyeing her sharply. "When I give orders I expect people to use their common sense. Why isn't my tea ready? It's five o'clock."

"The clock's twenty minutes fast," said Kate.

"Who's been meddling with it?" demanded her father, verifying the fact by his watch.

Miss Nugent shook her head.

"It's gained that since you regulated it last night," she said, with a smile.

The captain threw himself into an easy-chair, and with one eye on the clock waited until, at five minutes to the hour by the right time, a clatter of crockery sounded from the kitchen, and Bella, still damp, came in with the tray. Her eye was also on the clock, and she smirked weakly in the captain's direction as she saw that she was at least two minutes ahead of time. At a minute to the hour the teapot itself was on the tray, and the heavy breathing of the handmaiden in the kitchen was audible to all.

"Punctual to the minute, John," said Mrs. Kingdom, as she took her seat at the tray. "It's wonderful how that girl has improved since you've been at home. She isn't like the same girl."

She raised the teapot, and, after pouring out a little of the contents, put it down again and gave it another two minutes. At the end of that time, the colour being of the same unsatisfactory paleness, she set the pot down, and was about to raise the lid, when an avalanche burst into the room and, emptying some tea into the pot from a canister-lid, beat a hasty retreat.

"Good tea and well-trained servants," muttered the captain to his plate. "What more can a man want?"

Mrs. Kingdom coughed and passed his cup; Miss Nugent, who possessed a healthy appetite, serenely attacked her bread and butter; conversation languished.

"I suppose you've heard the news, John?" said his sister.

"I dare say I have," was the reply.

"Strange he should come back after all these years,"

said Mrs. Kingdom; "though, to be sure, I don't know why he shouldn't. It's his native place, and his father lives here."

"Who are you talking about?" inquired the captain.

"Why, James Hardy," replied his sister. "I thought you said you had heard. He's coming back to Sunwich and going into partnership with old Swann, the shipbroker. A very good thing for him, I should think."

"I'm not interested in the doings of the Hardys," said the captain, gruffly.

"I'm sure I'm not," said his sister, defensively.

Captain Nugent proceeded with his meal in silence. His hatred of Hardy had not been lessened by the success which had attended that gentleman's career, and was not likely to be improved by the well-being of Hardy junior. He passed his cup up for some more tea, and, with a furtive glance at the photograph on the mantelpiece, wondered what had happened to his own son.

"I don't suppose I should know him if I saw him," continued Mrs. Kingdom, addressing a respectable old armchair; "London is sure to have changed him."

"Is this water-cress?" inquired the captain, looking up from his plate.

"Yes. Why?" said Mrs. Kingdom.

"I only wanted information," said her brother, as he deposited the salad in question in the slop-basin.

Mrs. Kingdom, with a resigned expression, tried to catch her niece's eye, and caught the captain's instead. Miss Nugent, happening to glance up, saw her fascinated by the basilisk gaze of the master of the house.

"Some more tea, please," she said.

Her aunt took her cup, and in gratitude for the diversion picked out the largest lumps of sugar in the basin.

"London changes so many people," mused the persevering lady, stirring her tea. "I've noticed it before. Why it is I can't say, but the fact remains. It seems to improve them altogether. I dare say that young Hardy——"

"Will you understand that I won't have the Hardys mentioned in my house?" said the captain, looking up. "I'm not interested in their business, and I will not have it discussed here."

"As you please, John," said his sister, drawing herself up; "it's your house, and you are master here. I'm sure I don't want to discuss them. Nothing was farther

from my thoughts. You understand what your father says, Kate?"

"Perfectly," said Miss Nugent. "When the desire to talk about the Hardys becomes irresistible we must go for a walk."

The captain turned in his chair and regarded his daughter steadily. She met his gaze with calm affection.

"I wish you were a boy," he growled.

"You're the only man in Sunwich who wishes that," said Miss Nugent, complacently, "and I don't believe you mean it. If you'll come a little closer I'll put my head on your shoulder and convert you."

"Kate!" said Mrs. Kingdom, reprovingly.

"And, talking about heads," said Miss Nugent, briskly, "reminds me that I want a new hat. You needn't look like that; good-looking daughters always come expensive."

She moved her chair a couple of inches in his direction and smiled alluringly. The captain shifted uneasily; prudence counselled flight, but dignity forbade it. He stared hard at Mrs. Kingdom, and a smile of rare appreciation on that lady's face endeavoured to fade slowly and naturally into another expression. The chair came nearer.

"Don't be foolish," said the captain, gruffly.

The chair came still nearer, until at last it touched his, and then Miss Nugent, with a sigh of exaggerated content, allowed her head to sink gracefully on his shoulder.

"Most comfortable shoulder in Sunwich," she murmured; "come and try the other, aunt, and perhaps you'll get a new bonnet."

Mrs. Kingdom hastened to reassure her brother. She would almost as soon have thought of putting her head on the block. At the same time it was quite evident that she was taking a mild joy in his discomfiture, and eagerly awaiting further developments.

"When you are tired of this childish behaviour, Miss," said the captain, stiffly——

There was a pause.

"Kate!" said Mrs. Kingdom, in tones of mild reproof, "how can you?"

"Very good," said the captain; "we'll see who gets tired of it first. I'm in no hurry."

A delicate but unmistakable snore rose from his shoulder in reply.

CHAPTER VI.

For the first few days after his return Sunwich was full of surprises to Jem Hardy. The town itself had changed but little, and the older inhabitants were for the most part easily recognisable, but time had wrought wonders among the younger members of the population: small boys had attained to whiskered manhood, and small girls passing into well-grown young women had in some cases changed even their names.

The most astonishing and gratifying instance of the wonders effected by time was that of Miss Nugent. He saw her first at the window, and with a ready recognition of the enchantment lent by distance took the first possible opportunity of a closer observation. He then realised the enchantment afforded by proximity. The second opportunity led him impetuously into a draper's shop, where a magnificent shop-walker, after first ceremoniously handing him a high cane chair, passed on his order for pins in a deep and thrilling baritone, and retired in good order.

By the end of a week his observations were completed, and Kate Nugent, securely enthroned in his mind as the incarnation of feminine grace and beauty, left but little room for other matters. On his second Sunday at home, to his father's great surprise, he attended church, and after contemplating Miss Nugent's back hair for an hour and a half came home and spoke eloquently and nobly on "burying hatchets," "healing old sores," "letting bygones be bygones," and kindred topics.

"I never take much notice of sermons myself," said the captain, misunderstanding.

"Sermon?" said his son. "I wasn't thinking of the sermon, but I saw Captain Nugent there, and I remembered the stupid quarrel between you. It's absurd that it should go on indefinitely."

"Why, what does it matter?" inquired the other, staring. "Why shouldn't it? Perhaps it's the music that's affected you; some of those old hymns——"

"It wasn't the sermon and it wasn't the hymns," said his son, disdainfully; "it's just common sense. It seems to me that the enmity between you has lasted long enough."

"I don't see that it matters," said the captain; "it doesn't hurt me. Nugent goes his way and I go mine, but if I ever get a chance at the old man, he'd better look out. He wants a little of the starch taken out of him."

"Mere mannerism," said his son.

"He's as proud as Lucifer, and his girl takes after him," said the innocent captain. "By the way, she's grown up a very good-looking girl. You take a look at her the next time you see her."

His son stared at him.

"She'll get married soon, I should think," continued the other. "Young Murchison, the new doctor here, seems to be the favourite. Nugent is backing him, so they say; I wish him joy of his father-in-law."

Jem Hardy took his pipe into the garden, and, pacing slowly up and down the narrow paths, determined, at any costs, to save Dr. Murchison from such a father-in-law and Kate Nugent from any husband except of his choosing. He took a seat under an old apple tree, and, musing in the twilight, tried in vain to think of ways and means of making her acquaintance.

Meantime they passed each other as strangers, and the difficulty of approaching her only made the task more alluring. In the second week he reckoned up that he had seen her nine times. It was a satisfactory total, but at the same time he could not shut his eyes to the fact that five times out of that number he had seen Dr. Murchison as well, and neither of them appeared to have seen him.

He sat thinking it over in the office one hot afternoon. Mr. Adolphus Swann, his partner, had just returned from lunch, and for about the fifth time that day was arranging his white hair and short, neatly pointed beard in a small looking-glass. Over the top of it he glanced at Hardy, who, leaning back in his chair, bit his pen and stared hard at a paper before him.

"Is that the manifest of the *North Star?*" he inquired.

"No," was the reply.

Mr. Swann put his looking-glass away and watched the other as he crossed over to the window and gazed through the small, dirty panes at the bustling life of the harbour below. For a short time Hardy stood gazing in silence, and then, suddenly crossing the room, took his hat from a peg and went out.

"Restless," said the senior partner, wiping his folders with

great care and putting them on. "Wonder where he's put that manifest."

He went over to the other's desk and opened a drawer to search for it. Just inside was a sheet of foolscap, and Mr. Swann, with growing astonishment, slowly mastered the contents.

"*See her as often as possible.*"
"*Get to know some of her friends.*"
"*Try and get hold of the old lady.*"
"*Find out her tastes and ideas.*"
"*Show my hand before Murchison has it all his own way.*"

"It seems to me," said the bewildered shipbroker, carefully replacing the paper, "that my young friend is looking out for another partner. He hasn't lost much time."

He went back to his seat and resumed his work. It occurred to him that he ought to let his partner know what he had seen, and when Hardy returned he had barely seated himself before Mr. Swann, with a mysterious smile, crossed over to him, bearing a sheet of foolscap.

"Try and dress as well as my partner," read the astonished Hardy. "What's the matter with my clothes? What do you mean?"

Mr. Swann, in place of answering, returned to his desk, and, taking up another sheet of foolscap, began to write again, holding up his hand for silence as Hardy repeated his question. When he had finished his task he brought it over and placed it in the other's hand.

"Take her little brother out for walks."

Hardy crumpled the paper up and flung it aside. Then, with his face crimson, he stared wrathfully at the benevolent Swann.

"It's the safest card in the pack," said the latter. "You please everybody; especially the little brother. You should always hold his hand—it looks well for one thing, and if you shut your eyes——"

"I don't want any of your nonsense," said the maddened Jem. "What do you mean by reading my private papers?"

"I came over to look for the manifest," said Mr. Swann, "and I read it before I could make out what it was. You must admit that it's a bit cryptic. I thought it was a new

game at first. Getting hold of the old lady sounds like a sort of blind-man's buff. But why not get hold of the young one? Why waste time over——"

"Go to the devil!" said the junior partner.

"Any more suggestions I can give you, you are heartily welcome to," said Mr. Swann, going back to his seat. "All my vast experience is at your service, and the best and sweetest and prettiest girls in Sunwich regard me as a sort of second father."

"What's a second father?" inquired Jem, looking up—"a grandfather?"

"Go your own way," said the other; "I wash my hands of you. You're not in earnest, or you'd clutch at any straw. But let me give you one word of advice. Be careful how you get hold of the old lady; let her understand from the commencement that she is not the one."

Mr. Hardy went on with his work. There was a pile of it in front of him, and an accumulation in his drawers. For some time he wrote assiduously, but work was dry after the subject they had been discussing. He looked over at his partner, and, seeing that that gentleman was gravely busy, reopened the matter with a jeer.

"Old maids always know most about rearing children," he remarked; "so I suppose old bachelors, looking down on life from the top shelf, think they know most about marriage."

"I wash my hands of you," repeated the senior, placidly. "I am not to be taunted into rendering first aid to the wounded."

The conscience-stricken junior lost his presence of mind.

"Who's trying to taunt you?" he demanded, hotly. "Why, you'd do more harm than good."

"Put a bandage round the head instead of the heart, I expect," assented the chuckling Swann. "Top shelf, I think you said; well, I climbed there for safety."

"You must have been much run after," said his partner.

"I was," said the other. "I suppose that's why it is I am always so interested in these affairs. I have helped to marry so many people in this place that I'm almost afraid to stir out after dark."

Hardy's reply was interrupted by the entrance of Mr. Edward Silk, a young man of forlorn aspect, who combined in his person the offices of messenger, cleaner, and office-boy to

the firm. He brought in some letters and, placing them on Mr. Swann's desk, retired.

"There's another," said the latter, as the door closed. "His complaint is Amelia Kybird, and he's got it badly. She's big enough to eat him, but I believe that they are engaged. Perseverance has done it in his case. *He* used to go about like a blighted flower——"

"I am rather busy," his partner reminded him.

Mr. Swann sighed and resumed his own labours. For some time both men wrote in silence. Then the elder suddenly put his pen down and hit his desk a noisy thump with his fist.

"I've got it," he said, briskly; "apologise humbly for all your candour, and I will give you a piece of information which shall brighten your dull eyes, raise the corners of your drooping mouth, and renew once more the pink and cream in your youthful cheeks."

"Look here——" said the overwrought Hardy.

"Samson Wilks," interrupted Mr. Swann, "number three, Fullalove Alley, at home Fridays, seven to nine, to the daughter of his late skipper, who always visits him on that day. Don't try to thank me, Hardy, in case you break down. She's a very nice girl, and if she had been born twenty years earlier, or I had been born twenty years later, or you hadn't been born at all, there's no saying what might not have happened."

"When I want you to interfere in my business," said Hardy, working sedulously, "I'll let you know."

"Very good," replied Swann; "still, remember Thursdays, seven to nine."

"Thursdays," said Hardy, incautiously; "why, you said Fridays just now."

Mr. Swann made no reply. His nose was immersed in the folds of a large handkerchief, and his eyes watered profusely behind his glasses. It was some minutes before he had regained his normal composure, and even then the sensitive nerves of his partner were offended by an occasional belated chuckle.

Although by dint of casual and cautious inquiries Mr. Hardy found that his partner's information was correct, he was by no means guilty of any feelings of gratitude towards him; and he only glared scornfully when that excellent but frivolous man mounted a chair on Friday afternoon, and, putting the clock on a couple of hours or so, urged him to be in time.

The evening, however, found him starting slowly in the direction of Fullalove Alley. His father had gone to sea again, and the house was very dull; moreover, he felt a mild curiosity to see the changes wrought by time in Mr. Wilks. He walked along by the sea, and as the church clock struck the three-quarters turned into the alley and looked eagerly round for the old steward.

The labours of the day were over, and the inhabitants were for the most part out of doors taking the air. Shirt-sleeved householders, leaning against their door-posts smoking, exchanged ideas across the narrow space paved with cobble-stones which separated their small and ancient houses, while the matrons, more gregariously inclined, bunched in little groups and discussed subjects which in higher circles would have inundated the land with libel actions. Up and down the alley a tiny boy all ready for bed, with the exception of his nightgown, mechanically avoided friendly palms as he sought anxiously for his mother.

The object of Mr. Hardy's search sat at the door of his front room, which opened on to the alley, smoking an evening pipe, and noting with an interested eye the doings of his neighbours. He was just preparing to draw himself up in his chair as the intruder passed, when, to his utter astonishment, that gentleman stopped in front of him, and, taking possession of his hand, shook it fervently.

"How do you do?" he said, smiling.

Mr. Wilks eyed him stupidly, and, releasing his hand, coyly placed it in his trouser-pocket and breathed hard.

"I meant to come before," said Hardy, "but I've been so busy. How are you?"

Mr. Wilks, still dazed, muttered that he was very well. Then he sat bolt upright in his chair and eyed his visitor suspiciously.

"I've been longing for a chat with you about old times," said Hardy; "of all my old friends you seem to have changed the least. You don't look a day older."

"I'm getting on," said Mr. Wilks, trying to speak coldly, but observing with some gratification the effect produced upon his neighbours by the appearance of this well-dressed acquaintance.

"I wanted to ask your advice," said the unscrupulous Hardy, speaking in low tones. "I dare say you know I've just gone into partnership in Sunwich, and I'm told there's no man knows

more about the business and the ins and outs of this town than you do."

Mr. Wilks thawed despite himself. His face glistened and his huge mouth broke into tremulous smiles. For a moment he hesitated, and then noticing that a little group near them had suspended their conversation to listen to his he drew his chair back and, in a kind voice, invited the searcher after wisdom to step inside.

Hardy thanked him, and, following him in, took a chair behind the door, and with an air of youthful deference bent his ear to catch the pearls which fell from the lips of his host. Since he was a babe on his mother's knee sixty years before Mr. Wilks had never had such an attentive and admiring listener. Hardy sat as though glued to his chair, one eye on Mr. Wilks and the other on the clock, and it was not until that ancient timepiece struck the hour that the ex-steward suddenly realised the awkward state of affairs.

"Any more 'elp I can give you I shall always be pleased to," he said, looking at the clock.

Hardy thanked him at great length, wondering, as he spoke, whether Miss Nugent was of punctual habits. He leaned back in his chair and, folding his arms, gazed thoughtfully at the perturbed Mr. Wilks.

"You must come round and smoke a pipe with me sometimes," he said, casually.

Mr. Wilks flushed with gratified pride. He had a vision of himself walking up to the front door of the Hardys', smoking a pipe in a well-appointed room, and telling an incredulous and envious Fullalove Alley about it afterwards.

"I shall be very pleased, sir," he said, impressively.

"Come round on Tuesday," said his visitor. "I shall be at home then."

Mr. Wilks thanked him and, spurred on to hospitality, murmured something about a glass of ale, and retired to the back to draw it. He came back with a jug and a couple of glasses, and, draining his own at a draught, hoped that the example would not be lost upon his visitor. That astute person, however, after a modest draught, sat still, anchored to the half-empty glass.

"I'm expecting somebody to-night," said the ex-steward, at last.

"No doubt you have a lot of visitors," said the other, admiringly.

Mr. Wilks did not deny it. He eyed his guest's glass and fidgeted.

"Miss Nugent is coming," he said.

Instead of observing any signs of disorder and preparations for rapid flight, Mr. Wilks saw that the other was quite composed. He began to entertain a poor idea of Mr. Hardy's memory.

"She generally comes for a little quiet chat," he said.

"Indeed!"

"Just between the two of us," said the other.

His visitor said "Indeed," and, as though some chord of memory had been touched, sat gazing dreamily at Mr. Wilks's horticultural collection in the window. Then he changed colour a little as a smart hat and a pretty face crossed the tiny panes. Mr. Wilks changed colour too, and in an awkward fashion rose to receive Miss Nugent.

"Late as usual, Sam," said the girl, sinking into a chair. Then she caught sight of Hardy, who was standing by the door.

"It's a long time since you and I met, Miss Nugent," he said, bowing.

"Mr. Hardy?" said the girl, doubtfully.

"Yes, Miss," interposed Mr. Wilks, anxious to explain his position. "He called in to see me; quite a surprise to me it was. I 'ardly knowed him."

"The last time we three met," said Hardy, who to his host's discomfort had resumed his chair, "Wilks was thrashing me, and you were urging him on."

Kate Nugent eyed him carefully. It was preposterous that this young man should take advantage of a boy and girl acquaintance of eleven years before—and such an acquaintance!—in this manner. Her eyes expressed a little surprise, not unmixed with hauteur, but Hardy was too pleased to have them turned in his direction at all to quarrel with their expression.

"You were a bit of a trial in them days," said Mr. Wilks, shaking his head. "If I live to be ninety I shall never forget seeing Miss Kate capsized the way she was. The way she——"

"How is your cold?" inquired Miss Nugent, hastily.

"Better, Miss, thankee," said Mr. Wilks.

"Miss Nugent has forgotten and forgiven all that long ago," said Hardy.

"Quite," assented the girl, coldly; "one cannot remember all the boys and girls one knew as a child."

"Certainly not," said Hardy. "I find that many have slipped from my own memory, but I have a most vivid recollection of you."

Miss Nugent looked at him again, and an idea, strange and incredible, dawned slowly upon her. Childish impressions are lasting, and Jem Hardy had remained in her mind as a sort of youthful ogre. He sat before her now a frank, determined-looking young Englishman, in whose honest eyes admiration of herself could not be concealed. Indignation and surprise struggled for supremacy.

"It's odd," remarked Mr. Wilks, who had a happy knack at times of saying the wrong thing—"it's odd you should 'ave 'appened to come just at the same time as Miss Kate did."

"It's my good fortune," said Hardy, with a slight bow. Then he cocked a malignant eye at the innocent Mr. Wilks, and wondered at what age men discarded the useless habit of blushing.

Opposite him sat Miss Nugent, calmly observant, the slightest suggestion of disdain in her expression. Framed in the queer, high-backed old chair which had belonged to Mr. Wilks's grandfather, she made a picture at which Jem Hardy continued to gaze with respectful ardour. A hopeless sense of self-depreciation possessed him, but the idea that Murchison should aspire to so much goodness and beauty made him almost despair of his sex. His reverie was broken by the voice of Mr. Wilks.

"A quarter to *eight?*" said that gentleman, incredulously; "it can't be."

"I thought it was later than that," said Hardy, simply.

Mr. Wilks gasped, and with a faint shake of his head at the floor abandoned the thankless task of giving hints to a young man who was too obtuse to see them; and it was not until some time later that Mr. Hardy, sorely against his inclinations, gave his host a hearty hand-shake and, with a respectful bow to Miss Nugent, took his departure.

"Fine young man he's growed," said Mr. Wilks, deferentially turning to his remaining visitor; "greatly improved, I think."

Miss Nugent looked him over critically before replying.

"He seems to have taken a great fancy to you," she remarked.

Mr. Wilks smiled a satisfied smile.

"He came to ask my advice about business," he said, softly. "He's 'eard two or three speak o' me as knowing a thing or two, and being young, and just starting, 'e came to talk it over with me. I never see a young man so pleased and ready to take advice as wot he is."

"He is coming again for more, I suppose?" said Miss Nugent, carelessly.

Mr. Wilks acquiesced.

"And he asked me to go over to his 'ouse to smoke a pipe with 'im on Tuesday," he added, in the casual manner in which men allude to their aristocratic connections. "He's a bit lonely, all by himself."

Miss Nugent said "Indeed!" and then, lapsing into silence, gave little occasional side-glances at Mr. Wilks, as though in search of any hidden charms about him which might hitherto have escaped her.

At the same time Mr. James Hardy, walking slowly home by the edge of the sea, pondered on further ways and means of ensnaring the affections of the ex-steward.

CHAPTER VII.

THE anticipations of Mr. Wilks were more than realised on the following Tuesday. From the time a trim maid showed him into the smoking-room until late at night, when he left, a fêted and honoured guest, with one of his host's best cigars between his teeth, nothing that could yield him any comfort was left undone. In the easiest of easy chairs he sat in the garden beneath the leafy branches of apple trees, and undiluted wisdom and advice flowed from his lips in a stream as he beamed delightedly upon his entertainer.

Their talk was mainly of Sunwich and Sunwich people, and it was an easy step from these to Equator Lodge. On that subject most people would have found the ex-steward somewhat garrulous, but Jem Hardy listened with great content, and even brought him back to it when he showed signs of wandering. Altogether Mr. Wilks spent one of the pleasantest evenings of his life, and, returning home in a slight state of mental exhilaration, severely exercised the tongues of Fullalove Alley by a bearing considered incompatible with his station.

Jem Hardy paid a return call on the following Friday, and had no cause to complain of any lack of warmth in his reception. The ex-steward was delighted to see him, and, after showing him various curios picked up during his voyages, took him to the small yard in the rear festooned with scarlet-runner beans, and gave him a chair in full view of the neighbours.

"I'm the only visitor to-night?" said Hardy, after an hour's patient listening and waiting.

Mr. Wilks nodded casually.

"Miss Kate came last night," he said. "Friday *is* her night, but she came yesterday instead."

Mr. Hardy said "Oh, indeed!" and fell straightway into a dismal reverie from which the most spirited efforts of his host only partially aroused him.

Without giving way to undue egotism, it was pretty clear that Miss Nugent had changed her plans on his account, and a long vista of pleasant Friday evenings suddenly vanished. He too resolved to vary his visits, and, starting with a basis of two a week, sat trying to solve the mathematical chances of selecting the same as Kate Nugent—calculations which were not

facilitated by a long-winded account from Mr. Wilks of certain interesting amours of his youthful prime.

Before he saw Kate Nugent again, however, another old acquaintance turned up safe and sound in Sunwich. Captain Nugent walking into the town saw him first: a tall, well-knit young man in shabby clothing, whose bearing even in the distance was oddly familiar. As he came closer the captain's misgivings were confirmed, and in the sunburnt fellow in tattered clothes who advanced upon him with outstretched hand he reluctantly recognised his son.

"What have you come home for?" he inquired, ignoring the hand and eyeing him from head to foot.

"Change," said Jack Nugent, laconically, as the smile left his face.

The captain shrugged his shoulders and stood silent. His son looked first up the road and then down.

"All well at home?" he inquired.

"Yes."

Jack Nugent looked up the road again.

"Not much change in the town," he said, at length.

"No," said his father.

"Well, I'm glad to have seen you," said his son. "Good-bye."

"Good-bye," said the captain.

His son nodded and, turning on his heel, walked back towards the town. Despite his forlorn appearance his step was jaunty and he carried his head high. The captain watched him until he was hidden by a bend in the road, and then, ashamed of himself for displaying so much emotion, turned his own steps in the direction of home.

"Well, he didn't whine," he said, slowly. "He's got a bit of pride left."

Meantime the prodigal had reached the town again, and stood ruefully considering his position. He looked up the street, and then, the well-known shop of Mr. Kybird catching his eye, walked over and inspected the contents of the window. Sheath-knives, belts, tobacco-boxes, and watches were displayed alluringly behind the glass, sheltered from the sun by a row of cheap clothing dangling from short poles over the shop front. All the goods were marked in plain figures in reduced circumstances, Mr. Kybird giving a soaring imagination play in the first marking, and a good business faculty in the second.

At these valuables Jack Nugent, with a view of obtaining

some idea of prices, gazed for some time. Then passing between two suits of oilskins, which stood as sentinels in the doorway, he entered the shop and smiled affably at Miss Kybird, who was in charge. At his entrance she put down a piece of fancy-work, which Mr. Kybird called his sock, and with a casual glance at his clothes regarded him with a prejudiced eye.

"Beautiful day," said the customer; "makes one feel quite young again."

"What do you want?" inquired Miss Kybird.

Mr. Nugent turned to a broken cane-chair which stood by the counter, and, after applying severe tests, regardless of the lady's feelings, sat down upon it and gave a sigh of relief.

"I've walked from London," he said, in explanation. "I could sit here for hours."

"Look here——" began the indignant Miss Kybird.

"Only people would be sure to couple our names together," continued Mr. Nugent, mournfully. "When a handsome young man and a good-looking girl——"

"Do you want to buy anything or not?" demanded Miss Kybird, with an impatient toss of her head.

"No," said Jack, "I want to sell."

"You've come to the wrong shop, then," said Miss Kybird; "the warehouse is full of rubbish now."

The other turned in his chair and looked hard at the window.

"So it is," he assented. "It's a good job I've brought you something decent to put there."

He felt in his pockets and, producing a silver-mounted briar-pipe, a battered watch, a knife, and a few other small articles, deposited them with reverent care upon the counter.

"No use to us," declared Miss Kybird, anxious to hit back; "we burn coal here."

"These'll burn better than the coal you buy," said the unmoved customer.

"Well, we don't want them," retorted Miss Kybird, raising her voice, "and I don't want any of your impudence. Get up out of our chair."

Her heightened tones penetrated to the small and untidy room behind the shop. The door opened, and Mr. Kybird in his shirt-sleeves appeared at the opening.

"Wot's the row?" he demanded, his little black eyes glancing from one to the other.

"Only a lovers' quarrel," replied Jack. "You go away; we don't want you."

"Look 'ere, we don't want none o' your nonsense," said the shopkeeper, sharply; "and, wot's more, we won't 'ave it. Who put that rubbish on my counter?"

He bustled forward and, taking the articles in his hands, examined them closely.

"Three shillings for the lot—cash," he remarked.

"Done!" said the other.

"Did I say three?" inquired Mr. Kybird, startled at this ready acceptance.

"Five you said," replied Mr. Nugent, "but I'll take three, if you throw in a smile."

Mr. Kybird, much against his inclinations, threw in a faint grin, and opening a drawer produced three shillings and flung them separately on the counter. Miss Kybird thawed somewhat, and glancing from the customer's clothes to his face saw that he had a pleasant eye and a good moustache, together with a general air of recklessness much appreciated by the sex.

"Don't spend it on drink," she remarked, not unkindly.

"I won't," said the other, solemnly; "I'm going to buy house property with it."

"Why, darn my eyes," said Mr. Kybird, who had been regarding him closely—"darn my old eyes, if it ain't young Nugent! Well, well!"

"That's me," said young Nugent, cheerfully; "I should have known you anywhere, Kybird: same old face, same old voice, same old shirt-sleeves."

"'Ere, come now," objected the shopkeeper, shortening his arm and squinting along it.

"I should have known you anywhere," continued the other, mournfully; "and here I've thrown up a splendid berth and come all the way from Australia just for one glimpse of Miss Kybird, and she doesn't know me. When I die, Kybird, you will find the word 'Calais' engraven upon my heart."

Mr. Kybird said "Oh, indeed!"

His daughter tossed her head and bade Mr. Nugent take his nonsense to people who might like it.

"Last time I see you," said Mr. Kybird, pursing up his lips and gazing at the counter in an effort of memory—"last time I see you was one fifth o' November when you an' another bright young party was going about in two suits

o' oilskins wot I'd been 'unting for 'igh and low all day long."

Jack Nugent sighed.

"They were happy times, Kybird."

"Might ha' been for you," retorted the other, his temper rising a little at the remembrance of his wrongs.

"Have you come home for good?" inquired Miss Kybird, curiously. "Have you seen your father? He passed here a little while ago."

"I saw him," said Jack, with a brevity which was not lost upon the astute Mr. Kybird. "I may stay in Sunwich, and I may not—it all depends."

"You're not going 'ome?" said Mr. Kybird.

"No."

The shopkeeper stood considering. He had a small room to let at the top of his house, and he stood divided between the fear of not getting his rent and the joy to a man fond of simple pleasures, to be obtained by dunning the arrogant Captain Nugent for his son's debts. Before he could arrive at a decision his meditations were interrupted by the entrance of a stout, sandy-haired lady from the back parlour, who, having conquered his scruples against matrimony some thirty years before, had kept a particularly wide-awake eye upon him ever since.

"Your tea's a-gettin' cold," she remarked, severely.

Her husband received the news with calmness. He was by no means an enthusiast where that liquid was concerned, the admiration evoked by its non-inebriating qualities having been always something in the nature of a mystery to him.

"I'm coming," he retorted; "I'm just 'aving a word with Mr. Nugent 'ere."

"Well, I never did," said the stout lady, coming farther into the shop and regarding the visitor. "I shouldn't 'ave knowed 'im. If you'd asked me who 'e was I couldn't ha' told you—I shouldn't 'ave knowed 'im from Adam."

Jack shook his head.

"It's hard to be forgotten like this," he said, sadly. "Even Miss Kybird had forgotten me; after all that had passed between us."

"Eh?" said Mr. Kybird.

"Oh, don't take any notice of him," said his daughter. "I'd like to see myself."

Mr. Kybird pondered. He was still thinking of the son of

Captain Nugent being indebted to him for lodging, and the more he thought of the idea the better he liked it.

"Well, now you're 'ere," he said, with a great assumption of cordiality, "why not come in and 'ave a cup o' tea?"

The other hesitated a moment, and then, with a light laugh, accepted the offer. He followed them into the small and untidy back parlour, and, being requested by his hostess to squeeze in next to 'Melia at the small round table, complied so literally with the order that that young lady complained bitterly of his encroachments.

"And where do you think of sleeping to-night?" inquired Mr. Kybird, after his daughter had, to use her own expressive phrase, shown the guest "his place."

Mr. Nugent shook his head.

"I shall get a lodging somewhere," he said, airily.

"There's a room upstairs as you might 'ave if you liked," said Mr. Kybird, slowly. "It's been let to a very respectable clean young man for half a crown a week. Really it ought to be three shillings, but if you like to 'ave it at the old price you can."

"Done with you," said the other.

"No doubt you'll soon get something to do," continued Mr. Kybird, more in answer to his wife's inquiring glances than anything else. "Half a crown every Saturday and the room's yours."

Mr. Nugent thanked him, and after making a tea which caused Mr. Kybird to congratulate himself upon the fact that he had not offered to board him, sat regaling Mrs. Kybird and daughter with a recital of his adventures in Australia, receiving in return a full and true account of Sunwich and its people up to date.

"There's no pride about 'im, that's what I like," said Mrs. Kybird to her lord and master as they sat alone after closing time over a glass of gin and water. "He's a nice young feller, but bisness is bisness, and s'pose you don't get your rent?"

"I shall get it sooner or later," said Mr. Kybird. "That stuck-up father of 'is 'll be in a fine way at 'im living here. That's wot I'm thinking of."

"I don't see why," said Mrs. Kybird, bridling. "Who's Captin Nugent, I should like to know? We're as good as what 'e is, if not better. And as for the gell, if she'd got 'alf Amelia's looks she'd do."

"'Melia's a fine-looking gal," assented Mr. Kybird. "I

HE REGARDED THE WIFE OF HIS BOSOM WITH A CALCULATING GLANCE.
p. 55.

wonder——" He laid his pipe down on the table and stared at the mantelpiece. "He seems very struck with 'er" he concluded. "I see that directly."

"Not afore I did," said his wife, sharply.

"See it afore you come into the shop," said Mr. Kybird, triumphantly. "It 'ud be a strange thing to marry into that family, Emma."

"She's keeping company with young Teddy Silk," his wife reminded him, coldly; "and if she wasn't she could do better than a young man without a penny in 'is pocket. Pride's a fine thing, Dan'l, but you can't live on it."

"I know what I'm talking about," said Mr. Kybird, impatiently. "I know she's keeping company with Teddy as well as wot you do. Still, as far as money goes, young Nugent'll be all right."

"'Ow?" inquired his wife.

Mr. Kybird hesitated and took a sip of his gin and water. Then he regarded the wife of his bosom with a calculating glance which at once excited that lady's easily kindled wrath.

"You know I never tell secrets," she cried.

"Not often," corrected Mr. Kybird, "but then I don't often tell you any. Wot would you say to young Nugent coming into five 'undred pounds 'is mother left 'im when he's twenty-five? He don't know it, but I do."

"Five 'undred!" repeated his wife. "Sure?"

"No," said the other, "I'm not sure, but I know. I 'ad it from young Roberts when 'e was at Stone & Dartnell's. Five 'undred pounds! I shall get my money all right some time, and, if 'e wants a little bit to go on with, 'e can have it. He's honest enough; I can see that by his manner."

Upstairs in the tiny room under the tiles Mr. Jack Nugent, in blissful ignorance of his landlord's generous sentiments towards him, slept the sound, dreamless sleep of the man free from monetary cares. In the sanctity of her chamber Miss Kybird, gazing approvingly at the reflection of her yellow hair and fine eyes in the little cracked looking-glass, was already comparing him very favourably with the somewhat pessimistic Mr. Silk.

CHAPTER VIII.

Mr. Nugent's return caused a sensation in several quarters, the feeling at Equator Lodge bordering close upon open mutiny. Even Mrs. Kingdom plucked up spirit and read the astonished captain a homily upon the first duties of a parent—a homily which she backed up by reading the story of the Prodigal Son through to the bitter end. At the conclusion she broke down entirely and was led up to bed by Kate and Bella, the sympathy of the latter taking an acute form, and consisting mainly of innuendoes which could only refer to one person in the house.

Kate Nugent, who was not prone to tears, took a different line, but with no better success. The captain declined to discuss the subject, and, after listening to a description of himself in which Nero and other celebrities figured for the purpose of having their characters white-washed, took up his hat and went out.

Jem Hardy heard of the new arrival from his partner, and, ignoring that gentleman's urgent advice to make hay while the sun shone and take Master Nugent for a walk forthwith, sat thoughtfully considering how to turn the affair to the best advantage. A slight outbreak of diphtheria at Fullalove Alley had, for a time, closed that thoroughfare to Miss Nugent, and he was inclined to regard the opportune arrival of her brother as an effort of Providence on his behalf.

For some days, however, he looked for Jack Nugent in vain, that gentleman either being out of doors engaged in an earnest search for work, or snugly seated in the back parlour of the Kybirds, indulging in the somewhat perilous pastime of paying compliments to Amelia Kybird. Remittances which had reached him from his sister and aunt had been promptly returned, and he was indebted to the amiable Mr. Kybird for the bare necessaries of life. In these circumstances a warm feeling of gratitude towards the family closed his eyes to their obvious shortcomings.

He even obtained work down at the harbour through a friend of Mr. Kybird's. It was not of a very exalted nature, and caused more strain upon the back than the intellect, but seven years of roughing it had left him singularly free from caste prejudices—a freedom which he soon discovered was not

shared by his old acquaintances at Sunwich. The discovery made him somewhat bitter, and when Hardy stopped him one afternoon as he was on his way home from work he tried to ignore his outstretched hand and continue on his way.

"It is a long time since we met," said Hardy, placing himself in front of him.

"Good heavens!" said Jack, regarding him closely, "it's Jemmy Hardy—grown up spick and span like the industrious little boys in the school-books. I heard you were back here."

"I came back just before you did," said Hardy.

"Brass band playing you in and all that sort of thing, I suppose," said the other. "Alas! how the wicked prosper!—and you were wicked. Do you remember how you used to knock me about?"

"Come round to my place and have a chat," said Hardy.

Jack shook his head.

"They're expecting me in to tea," he said, with a nod in the direction of Mr. Kybird's, "and honest waterside labourers who earn their bread by the sweat of their brow—when the foreman is looking—do not frequent the society of the upper classes."

"Don't be a fool," said Hardy, politely.

"Well, I'm not very tidy," retorted Mr. Nugent, glancing at his clothes. "I don't mind it myself; I'm a philosopher, and nothing hurts me so long as I have enough to eat and drink; but I don't inflict myself on my friends, and I must say most of them meet me more than half-way."

"Imagination," said Hardy.

"All except Kate and my aunt," said Jack, firmly. "Poor Kate! I tried to cut her the other day."

"Cut her?" echoed Hardy.

Nugent nodded.

"To save her feelings," he replied; "but she wouldn't be cut, bless her, and on the distinct understanding that it wasn't to form a precedent I let her kiss me behind a wagon. Do you know, I fancy she's grown up rather good-looking, Jem?"

"You *are* observant," said Mr. Hardy, admiringly.

"Of course, it may be my partiality," said Mr. Nugent, with judicial fairness. "I was always a bit fond of Kate. I don't

suppose anybody else would see anything in her. Where are you living now ?"

"Fort Road," said Hardy. "Come round any evening you can, if you won't come now."

Nugent promised, and, catching sight of Miss Kybird standing in the doorway of the shop, bade him good-bye and crossed the road. It was becoming quite a regular thing for her to wait and have her tea with him now—an arrangement which was provocative of many sly remarks on the part of Mrs. Kybird.

"Thought you were never coming," said Miss Kybird, tartly, as she led the way to the back room and took her seat at the untidy tea-tray.

"And you've been crying your eyes out, I suppose," remarked Mr. Nugent, as he groped in the depths of a tall jar for black-currant jam. "Well, you're not the first, and I don't suppose you'll be the last. How's Teddy ?"

"Get your tea," retorted Miss Kybird, "and don't make that scraping noise on the bottom of the jar with your knife. It puts my teeth on edge."

"So it does mine," said Mr. Nugent, "but there's a black currant down there, and I mean to have it. 'Waste not, want not.'"

"Make him put that knife down," said Miss Kybird, as her mother entered the room.

Mrs. Kybird shook her head at him.

"You two are always quarrelling," she said, archly, "just like a couple of—couple of——"

"Love-birds," suggested Mr. Nugent.

Mrs. Kybird in great glee squeezed round to him and smote him playfully with her large, fat hand, and then, being somewhat out of breath with the exertion, sat down to enjoy the jest in comfort.

"That's how you encourage him," said her daughter; "no wonder he doesn't behave. No wonder he acts as if the whole place belongs to him."

The remark was certainly descriptive of Mr. Nugent's behaviour. His easy assurance and affability had already made him a prime favourite with Mrs. Kybird, and had not been without its effect upon her daughter. The constrained and severe company manners of Mr. Edward Silk showed up but poorly beside those of the paying guest, and Miss Kybird had on several occasions drawn comparisons which would

have rendered both gentlemen uneasy if they had known of them.

Mr. Nugent carried the same easy good-fellowship with him the following week when, neatly attired in a second-hand suit from Mr. Kybird's extensive stock, he paid a visit to Jem Hardy to talk over old times and discuss the future.

"You ought to make friends with your father," said the latter; "it only wants a little common sense and mutual forbearance."

"That's all," said Nugent; "sounds easy enough, doesn't it? No, all he wants is for me to clear out of Sunwich, and I'm not going to—until it pleases me, at any rate. It's poison to him for me to be living at the Kybirds' and pushing a trolly down on the quay. Talk about love sweetening toil, that does."

Hardy changed the subject, and Nugent, nothing loth, discoursed on his wanderings, and took him on a personally conducted tour through the continent of Australia.

"And I've come back to lay my bones in Sunwich Churchyard," he concluded, pathetically; "that is, when I've done with 'em."

"A lot of things'll happen before then," said Hardy.

"I hope so," rejoined Mr. Nugent, piously; "my desire is to be buried by my weeping great-grandchildren. In fact, I've left instructions to that effect in my will—all I have left, by the way."

"You're not going to keep on at this waterside work, I suppose?" said Hardy, making another effort to give the conversation a serious turn.

"The foreman doesn't think so," replied the other, as he helped himself to some whisky; "he has made several remarks to that effect lately."

He leaned back in his chair and smoked thoughtfully, by no means insensible to the comfort of his surroundings. He had not been in such comfortable quarters since he left home seven years before. He thought of the untidy litter of the Kybirds' back parlour, with the forlorn view of the yard in the rear. Something of his reflections he confided to Hardy as he rose to leave.

"But my market value is about a pound a week," he concluded, ruefully, "so I must cut my coat to suit my cloth. Good night."

He walked home somewhat soberly at first, but the air was cool and fresh, and a glorious moon was riding in the sky. He whistled cheerfully, and his spirits rose as various chimerical plans of making money occurred to him. By the time he reached the High Street, the shops of which were all closed for the night, he was earning five hundred a year and spending a thousand. He turned the handle of the door, and, walking in, discovered Miss Kybird entertaining company in the person of Mr. Edward Silk.

"Halloa," he said, airily, as he took a seat. "Don't mind me, young people. Go on just as you would if I were not here."

Mr. Edward Silk grumbled something under his breath; Miss Kybird, turning to the intruder with a smile of welcome, remarked that she had just thought of going to sleep.

"Going to sleep?" repeated Mr. Silk, thunderstruck.

"Yes," said Miss Kybird, yawning.

Mr. Silk gazed at her, open-mouthed. "What, with me 'ere?" he inquired, in trembling tones.

"You're not very lively company," said Miss Kybird, bending over her sewing. "I don't think you've spoken a word for the last quarter of an hour, and before that you were talking of death-warnings. Made my flesh creep, you did."

"Shame!" said Mr. Nugent.

"You didn't say anything to me about your flesh creeping," muttered Mr. Silk.

"You ought to have seen it creep," interposed Mr. Nugent, severely.

"I'm not talking to you," said Mr. Silk, turning on him. "When I want the favour of remarks from you I'll let you know."

"Don't you talk to my gentlemen friends like that, Teddy," said Miss Kybird, sharply, "because I won't have it. Why don't you try and be bright and cheerful like Mr. Nugent?"

Mr. Silk turned and regarded that gentleman steadfastly; Mr. Nugent meeting his gaze with a pleasant smile and a low-voiced offer to give him lessons at half a crown an hour.

"I wouldn't be like 'im for worlds," said Mr. Silk, with a scornful laugh. "I'd sooner be like anybody."

"What have you been saying to him?" inquired Nugent.

"Nothing," replied Miss Kybird; "he's often like that. He's got a nasty, miserable, jealous disposition. Not that I mind what he thinks."

Mr. Silk breathed hard and looked from one to the other.

"Perhaps he'll grow out of it," said Nugent, hopefully. "Cheer up, Teddy. You're young yet."

"Might I arsk," said the solemnly enraged Mr. Silk—"might I arsk you not to be so free with my Christian name?"

"He doesn't like his name now," said Nugent, drawing his chair closer to Miss Kybird's, "and I don't wonder at it. What shall we call him? Job? What's that work you're doing? Why don't you get on with that fancy waistcoat you are doing for me?"

Before Miss Kybird could deny all knowledge of the article in question her sorely tried swain created a diversion by rising. To that simple act he imparted an emphasis which commanded the attention of both beholders, and, drawing over to Miss Kybird, he stood over her in an attitude at once terrifying and reproachful.

"Take your choice, Amelia," he said, in a thrilling voice. "Me or 'im—which is it to be?"

"Here, steady, old man!" cried the startled Nugent. "Go easy!"

"Me or 'im?" repeated Mr. Silk, in stern but broken accents.

Miss Kybird giggled and, avoiding his gaze, looked pensively at the faded hearthrug.

"You're making her blush," said Mr. Nugent, sternly. "Sit down, Teddy! I'm ashamed of you. We're both ashamed of you. You're confusing us dreadfully proposing to us both in this way."

Mr. Silk regarded him with a scornful eye, but Miss Kybird, bidding him not to be foolish, punctuated her remarks with the needle, and a struggle, which Mr. Silk regarded as unseemly in the highest degree, took place between them for its possession. Mr. Nugent secured it at last, and brandishing it fiercely extorted feminine screams from Miss Kybird by threatening her with it. Nor was her mind relieved until Mr. Nugent, remarking that he would put it back in the pin-cushion, placed it in the leg of Mr. Edward Silk.

Mr. Kybird and his wife, entering through the shop, were just in time to witness a spirited performance on the part of Mr. Silk, the cherished purpose of which was to deprive them of a lodger. The young man drew back as they entered and, raising his voice above Miss Kybird's, began to explain his action.

"Teddy, I'm ashamed of you," said Mr. Kybird, shaking his head. "A little joke like that; a little innercent joke."

"If it 'ad been a darning-needle, now——" began Mrs. Kybird.

"All right," said the desperate Mr. Silk, "'ave it your own way. Let 'Melia marry 'im—I don't care—I give 'er up."

"Teddy!" said Mr. Kybird, in a shocked voice. "Teddy!"

Mr. Silk thrust him fiercely to one side and passed raging through the shop. The sound of articles falling in all directions attested to his blind haste, and the force with which he slammed the shop-door was sufficient evidence of his state of mind.

"Well, upon my word," said the staring Mr. Kybird; "of all the outrageyous——"

"Never mind 'im," said his wife, who was sitting in the easy-chair, distributing affectionate smiles between her daughter and the startled Mr. Nugent. "Make 'er happy, Jack, that's all I arsk. She's been a good gal, and she'll make a good wife. I've seen how it was between you for some time."

"So 'ave I," said Mr. Kybird.

He shook hands warmly with Mr. Nugent, and, patting that perturbed young man on the back, surveyed him with eyes glistening with approval.

"It's a bit rough on Teddy, isn't it?" inquired Mr. Nugent, anxiously; "besides——"

"Don't you worry about 'im," said Mr. Kybird, affectionately. "He ain't worth it."

"I wasn't," said Mr. Nugent, truthfully.

The situation had developed so rapidly that it had caught him at a disadvantage. He had a dim feeling that, having been the cause of Miss Kybird's losing one young man, the most elementary notions of chivalry demanded that he should furnish her with another. And this idea was clearly uppermost in the minds of her parents. He looked

over at Amelia, and with characteristic philosophy accepted the position.

"We shall be the handsomest couple in Sunwich," he said, simply.

"Bar none," said Mr. Kybird, emphatically.

The stout lady in the chair gazed at the couple fondly.

"It reminds me of our wedding," she said, softly. "What was it Tom Fletcher said, father? Can you remember?"

"'Arry Smith, you mean," corrected Mr. Kybird.

"Tom Fletcher said something, I'm sure," persisted his wife.

"He *did*," said Mr. Kybird, grimly; "and I pretty near broke 'is 'ead for it. 'Arry Smith is the one you're thinking of."

Mrs. Kybird, after a moment's reflection, admitted that he was right, and, the chain of memory being touched, waxed discursive about her own wedding and the somewhat exciting details which had accompanied it. After which she produced a bottle labelled "Port Wine" from the cupboard, and, filling four glasses, celebrated the occasion in a befitting but sober fashion.

"This," said Mr. Nugent, as he sat on his bed that night to take his boots off—"this is what comes of trying to make everybody happy and comfortable with a little fun. I wonder what the governor 'll say."

CHAPTER IX.

The news of his only son's engagement took Captain Nugent's breath away, which, all things considered, was perhaps the best thing it could have done. He sat at home in silent rage, only exploding when the well-meaning Mrs. Kingdom sought to minimise his troubles by comparing them with those of Job. Her reminder that to the best of her remembrance he had never had a boil in his life put the finishing touch to his patience, and, despairing of drawing-room synonyms for the words which trembled on his lips, he beat a precipitate retreat to the garden.

His son bore his new honours bravely. To an appealing and indignant letter from his sister he wrote gravely, reminding her of the difference in their years, and also that he had never interfered in her flirtations, however sorely his brotherly heart might have been wrung by them. He urged her to forsake such diversions for the future, and to look instead to an alliance with some noble, open-handed man with a large banking account and a fondness for his wife's relatives.

To Jem Hardy, who ventured on a delicate remonstrance one evening, he was less patient, and displayed a newly acquired dignity which was a source of considerable embarrassment to that well-meaning gentleman. He even got up to search for his hat, and was only induced to resume his seat by the physical exertions of his host.

"I didn't mean to be offensive," said the latter.

"But you were," said the aggrieved man.

Hardy apologised.

"Talk of that kind is a slight to my future wife," said Nugent, firmly. "Besides, what business is it of yours?"

Hardy regarded him thoughtfully. It was some time since he had seen Miss Nugent, and he felt that he was losing valuable time. He had hoped great things from the advent of her brother, and now his intimacy seemed worse than useless. He resolved to take him into his confidence.

"I spoke from selfish motives," he said, at last. "I wanted you to make friends with your father again."

"What for?" inquired the other, staring.

"To pave the way for me," said Hardy, raising his voice as he thought of his wrongs; "and now, owing to your con-

founded matrimonial business, that's all knocked on the head. I wouldn't care whom you married if it didn't interfere with my affairs so."

"Do you mean," inquired the astonished Mr. Nugent, "that you want to be on friendly terms with my father?"

"Yes."

Mr. Nugent gazed at him round-eyed.

"You haven't had a blow on the head, or anything of that sort, at any time, have you?" he inquired.

Hardy shook his head impatiently.

"You don't seem to suffer from an excess of intellect yourself," he retorted. "I don't want to be offensive again, still I should think it is pretty plain there is only one reason why I should go out of my way to seek the society of your father."

"Say what you like about my intellect," replied the dutiful son, "but I can't think of even one—not even a small one. Not—— Good gracious! You don't mean—you can't mean——"

Hardy looked at him.

"Not that," said Mr. Nugent, whose intellect had suddenly become painfully acute—"not *her?*"

"Why not?" inquired the other.

Mr. Nugent leaned back in his chair and regarded him with an air of kindly interest.

"Well, there's no need for you to worry about my father for that," he said; "he would raise no objection."

"*Eh?*" said Hardy, starting up from his chair.

"He would welcome it," said Mr. Nugent, positively. "There is nothing that he would like better; and I don't mind telling you a secret: she likes you."

Hardy reddened.

"How do you know?" he stammered.

"I know it for a fact," said the other, impressively. "I have heard her say so. But you've been very plain-spoken about me, Jem, so that I shall say what I think."

"Do," said his bewildered friend.

"I think you'd be throwing yourself away," said Nugent; "to my mind it's a most unsuitable match in every way. She's got no money, no looks, no style. Nothing but a good, kind heart, rather the worse for wear. I suppose you know she's been married once?"

"*What!*" shouted the other. "*Married?*"

Mr. Nugent nodded. His face was perfectly grave, but the

joke was beginning to prey upon his vitals in a manner which brooked no delay.

"I thought everybody knew it," he said. "We have never disguised the fact. Her husband died twenty years ago last——"

"Twenty——" said his suddenly enlightened listener. "Who?—What?"

Mr. Nugent, incapable of reply, put his head on the table, and beat the air frantically with his hand, while gasping sobs rent his tortured frame.

"Dear—aunt," he choked, "how pleas—pleased she'd be if—she knew. Don't look like that, Hardy. You'll kill me."

"You seem amused," said Hardy, between his teeth.

"And you'll be Kate's uncle," said Mr. Nugent, sitting up and wiping his eyes. "Poor little Kate!"

He put his head on the table again.

"And mine," he wailed. "*Uncle Jemmy!*—will you tip us half-crowns, nunky?"

Mr. Hardy's expression of lofty scorn only served to retard his recovery, but he sat up at last, and, giving his eyes a final wipe, beamed kindly upon his victim.

"Well, I'll do what I can for you," he observed, "but I suppose you know Kate's off for a three months' visit to London to-morrow?"

The other observed that he didn't know it, and, taught by his recent experience, eyed him suspiciously.

"It's quite true," said Nugent; "she's going to stay with some relatives of ours. She used to be very fond of one of the boys—her cousin Herbert—so you mustn't be surprised if she comes back engaged. But I dare say you'll have forgotten all about her in three months. And, any way, I don't suppose she'd look at you if you were the last man in the world. If you'll walk part of the way home with me I'll regale you with anecdotes of her childhood which will probably cause you to change your views altogether."

In Fullalove Alley Mr. Edward Silk, his forebodings fulfilled, received the news of Amelia Kybird's faithlessness in a spirit of quiet despair, and turned a deaf ear to the voluble sympathy of his neighbours. Similar things had happened to young men living there before, but their behaviour had been widely different to Mr. Silk's. Bob Crump, for instance, had been jilted on the very morning he had arranged for his wedding, but instead of going about in a state of gentle

melancholy he went round and fought his beloved's father—merely because he was her father—and wound up an exciting day by selling off his household gods to the highest bidders. Henry Jones in similar circumstances relieved his great grief by walking up and down the alley smashing every window within reach of his stick.

But these were men of spirit; Mr. Silk was cast in a different mould, and his fair neighbours sympathised heartily with him in his bereavement, while utterly failing to understand any man breaking his heart over Amelia Kybird.

His mother, a widow of uncertain age, shook her head over him and hinted darkly at consumption—an idea which was very pleasing to her son, and gave him an increased interest in a slight cold from which he was suffering.

"He wants taking out of 'imself," said Mr. Wilks, who had stepped across the alley to discuss the subject with his neighbour; "cheerful society and 'obbies—that's what 'e wants."

"He's got a faithful 'eart," sighed Mrs. Silk. "It's in the family; 'e can't 'elp it."

"But 'e might be lifted out of it," urged Mr. Wilks. "I 'ad several disappointments in my young days. One time I 'ad a fresh gal every v'y'ge a'most."

Mrs. Silk sniffed and looked up the alley, whereat two neighbours who happened to be at their doors glanced up and down casually, and retreated inside to continue their vigil from the windows.

"Silk courted me for fifteen years before I would say 'yes,'" she said, severely.

"Fifteen years!" responded the other. He cast his eyes upwards and his lips twitched. The most casual observer could have seen that he was engaged in calculations of an abstruse and elusive nature.

"I was only seven when 'e started," said Mrs. Silk, sharply.

Mr. Wilks brought his eyes to a level again. "Oh, seven," he remarked.

"And we was married two days before my nineteenth birthday," added Mrs. Silk, whose own arithmetic had always been her weak point.

"Just so," said Mr. Wilks.

He glanced at the sharp white face and shapeless figure before him.

"It's hard to believe you can 'ave a son Teddy's age," he added, gallantly.

"It makes you feel as if you're getting on," said the widow.

The ex-steward agreed, and after standing a minute or two in silence made a preliminary motion of withdrawal.

"Beautiful your plants are looking," said Mrs. Silk, glancing over at his window; "I can't think what you do to 'em."

The gratified Mr. Wilks began to explain. It appeared that plants wanted almost as much looking after as daughters.

"I should like to see 'em close," said Mrs. Silk.

"Come in and 'ave a look at 'em," responded her neighbour.

Mrs. Silk hesitated and displayed a maidenly coyness far in excess of the needs of the situation. Then she stepped across, and five seconds later the two matrons, with consternation writ large upon their faces, appeared at their doors again and, exchanging glances across the alley, met in the centre.

They were more surprised an evening or two later to see Mr. Wilks leave his house to pay a return visit, bearing in his hand a small bunch of his cherished blooms. That they were blooms which would have paid the debt of Nature in a few hours at most in no way detracted from the widow's expressions of pleasure at receiving them, and Mr. Wilks, who had been invited over to cheer up Mr. Silk, who was in a particularly black mood, sat and smiled like a detected philanthropist as she placed them in water.

"Good evenin', Teddy," he said, breezily, with a side-glance at his hostess. "What a lovely day we've 'ad!"

"So bright," said Mrs. Silk, nodding with spirit.

Mr. Wilks sat down and gave vent to such a cheerful laugh that the ornaments on the mantelpiece shook with it.

"It's good to be alive," he declared.

"Ah, you enjoy your life, Mr. Wilks," said the widow.

"Enjoy it!" roared Mr. Wilks; "enjoy it! Why shouldn't I? Why shouldn't everybody enjoy their lives? It was what they was given to us for."

"So they was," affirmed Mrs. Silk; "nobody can deny that; not if they try."

"Nobody wants to deny it, ma'am," retorted Mr. Wilks, in the loud voice he kept for cheering-up purposes. "I enjoy every day o' my life."

He filled his pipe, chuckling serenely, and, having lit it, sat and enjoyed that. Mrs. Silk retired for a space, and returning

with a jug of ale poured him out a glass and set it by his elbow.

"Here's your good 'ealth, ma'am," said Mr. Wilks, raising it. "Here's yours, Teddy—a long life and a 'appy one."

Mr. Silk turned listlessly.

"I don't want a long life," he remarked.

His mother and her visitor exchanged glances.

"That's 'ow 'e goes on," remarked the former, in an audible whisper.

Mr. Wilks nodded, reassuringly.

"I 'ad them ideas once," he said, "but they go off. If you could only live to see Teddy at the age o' ninety-five, 'e wouldn't want to go then. 'E'd say it was crool hard, being cut off in the flower of 'is youth."

Mrs. Silk laughed gaily, and Mr. Wilks bellowed a gruff accompaniment. Mr. Edward Silk eyed them pityingly.

"That's the 'ardship of it," he said, slowly, as he looked round from his seat by the fireplace; "that's where the 'ollowness of things comes in. That's where I envy Mr. Wilks."

"Envy me?" said the smiling visitor. "What for?"

"Because you're so near the grave," said Mr. Silk.

Mr. Wilks, who was taking another draught of beer, put the glass down and eyed him fixedly.

"That's why I envy you," continued the other. "I don't want to live, and you do, and yet I dessay I shall be walking about forty and fifty years after you're dead and forgotten."

"Wot d'ye mean—near the grave?" inquired Mr. Wilks, somewhat shortly.

"I was referring to your age," replied the other; "it's strange to see 'ow the aged 'ang on to life. You can't 'ave much pleasure at your time o' life. And you're all alone; the last withered branch left."

"*Withered branch!*" began Mr. Wilks; "'ere—look 'ere, Teddy——"

"All the others 'ave gone," pursued Mr. Silk, "and they're beckoning to you."

"Let 'em beckon," said Mr. Wilks, coldly. "As 'ard as they like."

"You're not young," said Mr. Silk, gazing meditatively at the grate, "and I envy you that. It can only be a matter of a year or two at most before you are sleeping your last long sleep."

"Teddy!" protested Mrs. Silk.

"It's true, mother," said the melancholy youth. "Mr. Wilks *is* old. Why should 'e mind being told of it? If 'e had 'ad the trouble I've 'ad, 'e'd be glad to go. But he'll 'ave to go, whether 'e likes it or not. It might be to-night. Who can tell?"

Mr. Wilks, unasked, poured himself out another glass of ale, and drank it off with the air of a man who intended to make sure of something. It seemed a trifle more flat than the last.

"So many men o' your age and thereabouts," continued Mr. Silk, "think that they're going to live on to eighty or ninety, but there's very few of 'em do. It's only a short while, Mr. Wilks, and the little children'll be running about over your grave and picking daisies off of it."

"Ho, will they?" said the irritated Mr. Wilks. "They'd better not let me catch 'em at it, that's all."

"He's always talking like that now," said Mrs. Silk, not without a certain pride in her tones; "that's why I asked you in to cheer 'im up."

"All your troubles'll be over then," continued the warning voice, "and in a month or two even your name'll be forgotten. That's the way of the world. Think 'ow soon the last five years of your life 'ave passed; the next five'll pass ten times as fast even if you live as long, which ain't likely."

"He talks like a clergyman," said Mrs. Silk, in a stage whisper.

Mr. Wilks nodded, and despite his hostess's protests rose to go. He shook hands with her and, after a short but sharp inward struggle, shook hands with her son. It was late in the evening as he left, but the houses had not yet been lit up. Dim figures sat in doorways or stood about the alley, and there was an air of peace and rest strangely and uncomfortably in keeping with the conversation to which he had just been listening. He looked in at his own door; the furniture seemed stiffer than usual and the tick of the clock more deliberate. He closed the door again, and, taking a deep breath, set off towards the life and bustle of the "Two Schooners."

CHAPTER X.

TIME failed to soften the captain's ideas concerning his son's engagement, and all mention of the subject in the house was strictly forbidden. Occasionally he was favoured with a glimpse of his son and Miss Kybird out together, a sight which imparted such a flavour to his temper and ordinary intercourse that Mrs. Kingdom, in unconscious imitation of Mr. James Hardy, began to count the days which must elapse before her niece's return from London. His ill-temper even infected the other members of the household, and Mrs. Kingdom sat brooding in her bedroom all one afternoon, over the fact that Bella had called her an "overbearing dishpot."

The finishing touch to the captain's patience was supplied by a little misunderstanding between Mr. Kybird and the police. For the second time in his career the shopkeeper appeared before the magistrates to explain the circumstances in which he had purchased stolen property, and for the second time he left the court without a stain on his character, but with a significant magisterial caution not to appear there again. Jack Nugent gave evidence in the case, and some of his replies were deemed worthy of reproduction in the *Sunwich Herald*—a circumstance which lost the proprietors a subscriber of many years' standing.

One by one various schemes for preventing his son's projected alliance were dismissed as impracticable. A cherished design of confining him in an asylum for the mentally afflicted until such time as he should have regained his senses was spoilt by the refusal of Dr. Murchison to arrange for the necessary certificate; a refusal which was like to have been fraught with serious consequences to that gentleman's hopes of entering the captain's family.

Brooding over his wrongs, the captain, a day or two after his daughter's return, strolled slowly down towards the harbour. It was afternoon, and the short winter day was already drawing towards a close. The shipping looked cold and desolate in the greyness, but a bustle of work prevailed on the *Conqueror*, which was nearly ready for sea again. The captain's gaze wandered from his old craft to the small vessels dotted about the harbour, and finally dwelt admiringly on the lines of the whaler *Seabird*, which had put

in a few days before as the result of a slight collision with a fishing-boat. She was high out of the water and beautifully rigged. A dog ran up and down her decks barking, and a couple of squat figures leaned over the bulwarks gazing stolidly ashore.

There was something about the vessel which took his fancy, and he stood for some time on the edge of the quay, looking at her. In a day or two she would sail for a voyage the length of which would depend upon her success; a voyage which would for a long period keep all on board of her out of the mischief which so easily happens ashore. If only Jack——

He started and stared more intently than before. He was not an imaginative man, but he had in his mind's eye a sudden vision of his only son waving farewells from the deck of the whaler as she emerged from the harbour into the open sea, while Amelia Kybird tore her yellow locks ashore. It was a vision to cheer any self-respecting father's heart, and he brought his mind back with some regret to the reality of the anchored ship.

He walked home slowly. At the Kybirds' door the proprietor, smoking a short clay pipe, eyed him with furtive glee as he passed. Farther along the road the Hardys, father and son, stepped briskly together. Altogether a trying walk, and calculated to make him more dissatisfied than ever with the present state of affairs. When his daughter shook her head at him and accused him of going off on a solitary frolic his stock of patience gave out entirely.

A thoughtful night led to a visit to Mr. Wilks the following evening. It required a great deal of deliberation on his part before he could make up his mind to the step, but he needed his old steward's assistance in a little plan he had conceived for his son's benefit, and for the first time in his life he paid him the supreme honour of a call.

The honour was so unexpected that Mr. Wilks, coming into the parlour in response to the tapping of the captain's stick on the floor, stood for a short time eyeing him in dismay. Only two minutes before he had taken Mr. James Hardy into the kitchen to point out the interior beauties of an ancient clock, and the situation simply appalled him. The captain greeted him almost politely and bade him sit down. Mr. Wilks smiled faintly and caught his breath.

"Sit down!" repeated the captain.

"I've left something in the kitchen, sir," said Mr. Wilks. "I'll be back in half a minute."

The captain nodded. In the kitchen Mr. Wilks rapidly and incoherently explained the situation to Mr. Hardy.

"I'll sit here," said the latter, drawing up a comfortable oak chair to the stove.

"You see, he don't know that we know each other," explained the apologetic steward, "but I don't like leaving you in the kitchen."

"I'm all right," said Hardy; "don't you trouble about me."

He waved him away, and Mr. Wilks, still pale, closed the door behind him and, rejoining the captain, sat down on the extreme edge of a chair and waited.

"I've come to see you on a little matter of business," said his visitor.

Mr. Wilks smiled; then, feeling that perhaps that was not quite the right thing to do, looked serious again.

"I came to see you about my—my son," continued the captain.

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Wilks. "Master Jack, you mean?"

"I've only got one son," said the other, unpleasantly, "unless you happen to know of any more."

Mr. Wilks almost fell off the edge of the chair in his haste to disclaim any such knowledge. His ideas were in a ferment, and the guilty knowledge of what he had left in the kitchen added to his confusion. And just at that moment the door opened and Miss Nugent came briskly in.

Her surprise at seeing her father ensconced in a chair by the fire led to a rapid volley of questions. The captain, in lieu of answering them, asked another.

"What do you want here?"

"I have come to see Sam," said Miss Nugent. "Fancy seeing you here! How are you, Sam?"

"Pretty well, Miss, thank'ee," replied Mr. Wilks, "considering," he added, truthfully, after a moment's reflection.

Miss Nugent dropped into a chair and put her feet on the fender. Her father eyed her restlessly.

"I came here to speak to Sam about a private matter," he said, abruptly.

"Private matter," said his daughter, looking round in surprise. "What about?"

"A private matter," repeated Captain Nugent. "Suppose you come in some other time."

Kate Nugent sighed and took her feet from the fender.

"I'll go and wait in the kitchen," she said, crossing to the door.

Both men protested: the captain, because it ill assorted with his dignity for his daughter to sit in the kitchen, and Mr. Wilks because of the visitor already there. The face of the steward, indeed, took on such extraordinary expressions in his endeavour to convey private information to the girl that she gazed at him in silent amazement. Then she turned the handle of the door, and, passing through, closed it with a bang which was final.

Mr. Wilks stood spellbound, but nothing happened. There was no cry of surprise; no hasty reappearance of an indignant Kate Nugent. His features working nervously he resumed his seat and gazed dutifully at his superior officer.

"I suppose you've heard that my son is going to get married?" said the latter.

"I couldn't help hearing of it, sir," said the steward in self-defence—"nobody could."

"He's going to marry that yellow-headed Jezebel of Kybird's," said the captain, staring at the fire.

Mr. Wilks murmured that he couldn't understand anybody liking yellow hair, and, more than that, the general opinion of the ladies in Fullalove Alley was that it was dyed.

"I'm going to ship him on the *Seabird*," continued the captain. "She'll probably be away for a year or two, and, in the meantime, this girl will probably marry somebody else. Especially if she doesn't know what has become of him. He can't get into mischief aboard ship."

"No, sir," said the wondering Mr. Wilks. "Is Master Jack agreeable to going, sir?"

"That's nothing to do with it," said the captain, sharply.

"No, sir," said Mr. Wilks, "o' course not. I was only a sort o' wondering how he was going to be persuaded to go if 'e ain't."

"That's what I came here about," said the other. "I want you to go and fix it up with Nathan Smith."

"Do you want 'im to be *crimped*, sir?" stammered the astonished Mr. Wilks.

"I want him shipped aboard the *Seabird*," returned the other, "and Smith's the man to do it."

"It's a very hard thing to do in these days, sir," said

Mr. Wilks, shaking his head. "What with signing on aboard the day before the ship sails, and before the Board o' Trade officer, I'm sure it's a wonder that anybody goes to sea at all."

"You leave that to Smith," said the captain, impatiently. "The *Seabird* sails on Friday morning's tide. Tell Smith I'll arrange to meet my son here on Thursday night, and that he must have some liquor for us and a fly waiting on the beach."

Mr. Wilks wriggled: "But what about signing on, sir?" he inquired.

"He won't sign on," said the captain; "he'll be a stowaway. Smith must get him smuggled aboard, and bribe the hands to let him lie hidden in the fo'c's'le. The *Seabird* won't put back to put him ashore. Here is five pounds; give Smith two or three now, and the remainder when the job is done."

The steward took the money reluctantly and, plucking up his courage, looked his old master in the face.

"It's a 'ard life afore the mast, sir," he said, slowly.

"Rubbish!" was the reply. "It'll make a man of him. Besides, what's it got to do with you?"

"I don't care about the job, sir," said Mr. Wilks, bravely.

"What's that got to do with it?" demanded the other, frowning. "You go and fix it up with Nathan Smith as soon as possible."

Mr. Wilks shuffled his feet and strove to remind himself that he was a gentleman of independent means, and could please himself.

"I've known 'im since he was a baby," he murmured, defiantly.

"I don't want to hear anything more from you, Wilks," said the captain, in a hard voice. "Those are my orders, and you had better see that they are carried out. My son will be one of the first to thank you later on for getting him out of such a mess."

Mr. Wilks's brow cleared somewhat.

"I s'pose Miss Kate 'ud be pleased too," he remarked, hopefully.

"Of course she will," said the captain. "Now I look to you, Wilks, to manage this thing properly. I wouldn't trust anybody else, and you've never disappointed me yet."

The steward gasped and, doubting whether he had heard aright, looked towards his old master, but in vain, for the

confirmation of further compliments. In all his long years of service he had never been praised by him before. He leaned forward eagerly and began to discuss ways and means.

In the next room conversation was also proceeding, but fitfully. Miss Nugent's consternation when she closed the door behind her and found herself face to face with Mr. Hardy was difficult of concealment. Too late she understood the facial contortions of Mr. Wilks, and, resigning herself to the inevitable, accepted the chair placed for her by the highly pleased Jem, and sat regarding him calmly from the other side of the fender.

"I am waiting here for my father," she said, in explanation.

"In deference to Wilks's terrors I am waiting here until he has gone," said Hardy, with a half smile.

There was a pause. "I hope that he will not be long," said the girl.

"Thank you," returned Hardy, wilfully misunderstanding, "but I am in no hurry."

He gazed at her with admiration. The cold air had heightened her colour, and the brightness of her eyes shamed the solitary candle which lit up the array of burnished metal on the mantelpiece.

"I hope you enjoyed your visit to London," he said.

Before replying Miss Nugent favoured him with a glance designed to express surprise at least at his knowledge of her movements.

"Very much, thank you," she said, at last.

Mr. Hardy, still looking at her with much comfort to himself, felt an insane desire to tell her how much she had been missed by one person at least in Sunwich. Saved from this suicidal folly by the little common sense which had survived the shock of her sudden appearance, he gave the information indirectly.

"Quite a long stay," he murmured; "three months and three days; no, three months and two days."

A sudden wave of colour swept over the girl's face at the ingenuity of this mode of attack. She was used to attention, and took compliments as her due, but the significant audacity of this one baffled her. She sat with downcast eyes looking at the fender, occasionally glancing from the corner of her eye to see whether he was preparing to renew the assault. He had certainly changed from the Jem Hardy of olden days. She had a faint idea that his taste had improved.

"Wilks keeps his house in good order," said Hardy, looking round.

"Yes," said the girl.

"Wonder why he never married," said Hardy, musingly; "for my part, I can't understand a man remaining single all his life; can you?"

"I never think of such things," said Miss Nugent, coldly—and untruthfully.

"If it was only to have somebody to wait on him and keep his house clean," pursued Hardy, with malice.

Miss Nugent grew restless, and the wrongs of her sex stirred within her.

"You have very lofty ideas on the subject," she said, scornfully, "but I believe they are not uncommon."

"Still, you have never thought about such things, you know," he reminded her.

"And no doubt you have devoted a great deal of time to the subject."

Hardy admitted it frankly.

"But only since I returned to Sunwich," he said.

"Caused by the spectacle of Sam's forlorn condition, I suppose," said Miss Nugent.

"No, it wasn't that," he replied.

Miss Nugent, indignant at having been drawn into such a discussion, lapsed into silence. It was safer and far more dignified, but at the same time she yearned for an opportunity of teaching this presumptuous young man a lesson. So far he had had it all his own way—a way strewn with ambiguities which a modest maiden had to ignore despite herself.

"Of course, Wilks may have had a disappointment," said Hardy, with the air of one willing to make allowances.

"I believe he had about fifty," said the girl, carelessly.

Hardy shook his head in strong disapproval.

"No man should have more than one," he said, firmly; "a man of any strength of will wouldn't have that."

"Strength of will?" repeated the astonished Miss Nugent.

Their eyes met; hers sparkling with indignation; his full of cold calculation. If he had had any doubts before, he was quite sure now that he had gone the right way to work to attract her attention; she was almost quivering with excitement.

"Your ideas will probably change with age—and disappointment," she said, sweetly.

"I shall not be disappointed," said Hardy, coolly. "I'll take care of that."

Miss Nugent eyed him wistfully, and racked her brains for an appropriate and crushing rejoinder. In all her experience —and it was extensive, considering her years—she had never met with such carefully constructed audacity, and she longed, with a great longing, to lure him into the open and destroy him.

She was still considering ways and means of doing this when the door opened and revealed the surprised and angry form of her father, and behind it the pallid countenance of Mr. Wilks. For a moment anger deprived the captain of utterance.

"Who—— ?" he stammered. "What—— ?"

"What a long time you've been, father," said Miss Nugent, in a reproving voice. "I began to be afraid you were never going."

"You come home with me," said the captain, recovering.

The command was given in his most imperious manner, and his daughter dropped her muff in some resentment as she rose, in order to let him have the pleasure of seeing Mr. Hardy pick it up. It rolled, however, in his direction, and he stooped for it just as Hardy darted forward. Their heads met with a crash, and Miss Nugent forgot her own consternation in the joy of beholding the pitiable exhibition which terror made of Mr. Wilks.

"I'm very sorry," said Hardy, as he reverently dusted the muff on his coat-sleeve before returning it. "I'm afraid it was my fault."

"It was," said the infuriated captain, as he held the door open for his daughter. "Now, Kate."

Miss Nugent passed through, followed by her father, and escorted to the front door by the steward, whose faint "Good night" was utterly ignored by his injured commander. He stood at the door until they had turned the corner, and, returning to the kitchen, found his remaining guest holding his aching head beneath the tap.

"And now," said the captain, sternly, to his daughter, "how dare you sit and talk to that young cub? Eh? How dare you?"

"He was there when I went in," said his daughter.

"Why didn't you come out, then?" demanded her father.

"I was afraid of disturbing you and Sam," said Miss Nugent. "Besides, why shouldn't I speak to him?"

"Why?" shouted the captain. "Why? Because I won't have it."

"I thought you liked him," said Miss Nugent, in affected surprise. "You patted him on the head."

The captain, hardly able to believe his ears, came to an impressive stop in the roadway, but Miss Nugent walked on. She felt instinctively that the joke was thrown away on him, and, in the absence of any other audience, wanted to enjoy it without interruption. Convulsive and half-suppressed sounds, which she ascribed to a slight cold caught while waiting in the kitchen, escaped her at intervals for the remainder of the journey home.

CHAPTER XI.

JACK NUGENT'S first idea on receiving a letter from his father asking him to meet him at Samson Wilks's was to send as impolite a refusal as a strong sense of undutifulness and a not inapt pen could arrange, but the united remonstrances of the Kybird family made him waver.

"You go," said Mr. Kybird, solemnly; "take the advice of a man wot's seen life, and go. Who knows but wot he's a-thinking of doing something for you?"

"Startin' of you in business or somethin'," said Mrs. Kybird. "But if 'e tries to break it off between you and 'Melia I hope you know what to say."

"He won't do that," said her husband.

"If he wants to see me," said Mr. Nugent, "let him come here."

"I wouldn't 'ave him in my house," retorted Mr. Kybird, quickly. "An Englishman's 'ouse is his castle, and I won't 'ave him in mine."

"Why not, Dan'l," asked his wife, "if the two families is to be connected?"

Mr. Kybird shook his head, and, catching her eye, winked at her with much significance.

"'Ave it your own way," said Mrs. Kybird, who was always inclined to make concessions in minor matters. "'Ave it your own way, but don't blame me, that's all I ask."

Urged on by his friends Mr. Nugent at last consented, and, in a reply to his father, agreed to meet him at the house of Mr. Wilks on Thursday evening. He was not free himself from a slight curiosity as to the reasons which had made the captain unbend in so unusual a fashion.

Mr. Nathan Smith put in an appearance at six o'clock on the fatal evening. He was a short, slight man, with a clean-shaven face mapped with tiny wrinkles, and a pair of colourless eyes, the blankness of whose expression defied research. In conversation, especially conversation of a diplomatic nature, Mr. Smith seemed to be looking through his opponent at something beyond, an uncomfortable habit which was a source of much discomposure to his victims.

"Here we are, then, Mr. Wilks," he said, putting his head in the door and smiling at the agitated steward.

"Come in," said Mr. Wilks, shortly.

Mr. Smith obliged.

"Nice night outside," he said, taking a chair; "clear over'ead. Wot a morning it 'ud be for a sail if we was only young enough! Is that terbacker in that canister there?"

The other pushed it towards him.

"If I was only young enough—and silly enough," said the boarding-house master, producing a pipe with an unusually large bowl and slowly filling it, "there's nothing I should enjoy more than a three years' cruise. Nothing to do and everything of the best."

"'Ave you made all the arrangements?" inquired Mr. Wilks, in a tone of cold superiority.

Mr. Smith glanced affectionately at a fish-bag of bulky appearance which stood on the floor between his feet.

"All ready," he said, cheerfully, "an' if you'd like a v'y'ge yourself I can manage it for you in two twos. You've on'y got to say the word."

"I don't want one," said the steward, fiercely; "don't you try none o' your larks on me, Nathan Smith, cos I won't have it."

"Lord love your 'art," said the boarding master, "I wouldn't 'urt you. I'm on'y acting under your orders

now; yours and the captin's. It ain't in my reg'lar way o' business at all, but I'm so good-natured I can't say 'no.'

"Can't say 'no' to five pounds, you mean," retorted Mr. Wilks, who by no means relished these remarks.

"If I was getting as much out of it as you are I'd be a 'appy man," sighed Mr. Smith.

"Me!" cried the other; "do you think I'd take money for this—why, I'd sooner starve, I'd sooner—— Wot are you a-tapping your nose for?"

"Was I tapping it?" demanded Mr. Smith, in surprise. "Well, I didn't know it. I'm glad you told me."

"You're quite welcome," said the steward, sharply. "Crimping ain't in my line; I'd sooner sweep the roads."

"'Ear, 'ear!" exclaimed Mr. Smith, approvingly. "Ah! wot a thing it is to come acrost an honest man! Wot a good thing it is for the eyesight!"

He stared stonily somewhere in the direction of Mr. Wilks, and then, blinking rapidly, shielded his eyes with his hand as though overcome by the sight of so much goodness. The steward's wrath rose at the performance, and he glowered back at him until his eyes watered.

"Twenty past six," said Mr. Smith, suddenly, as he fumbled in his waistcoat-pocket and drew out a small folded paper. "It's time I made a start. I s'pose you've got some salt in the house?"

"Plenty," said Mr. Wilks

"And beer?" inquired the other.

"Yes, there is some beer," said the steward.

"Bring me a quart of it," said the boarding master, slowly and impressively. "I want it drawed in a china mug, with a nice foaming 'ead on it."

"Wot do you want it for?" inquired Mr. Wilks, eyeing him very closely.

"Bisness purposes," said Mr. Smith. "If you're very good you shall see 'ow I do it."

Still the steward made no move. "I thought you brought the stuff with you," he remarked.

Mr. Smith looked at him with mild reproach.

"Are you managing this affair or am I?" he inquired.

The steward went out reluctantly, and drawing a quart mug of beer set it down on the table and stood watching his visitor.

"And now I want a spoonful o' sugar, a spoonful o' salt, and a spoonful o' vinegar," said Mr. Smith. "Make haste afore the 'ead goes off of it."

Mr. Wilks withdrew grumbling, and came back, in a wonderfully short space of time considering, with the articles required.

"Thank'ee," said the other; "you 'ave been quick. I wish I could move as quick as you do. But you can take 'em back now, I find I can do without 'em."

"Where's the beer?" demanded the incensed Mr. Wilks—"where's the beer, you underhanded swab?"

"I altered my mind," said Mr. Smith, "and not liking waste, and seeing by your manner that you've 'ad more than enough already to-night, I drunk it. There isn't another man in Sunwich I could ha' played that trick on—no, nor a boy, neither."

Mr. Wilks was about to speak, but, thinking better of it, threw the three spoons into the kitchen, and, resuming his seat by the fire, sat with his back half turned to his visitor.

"Bright, cheerful young chap, 'e is," said Mr. Smith; "you've knowed 'im ever since he was a baby, haven't you?"

Mr. Wilks made no reply.

"The *Conqueror's* sailing to-morrow morning, too," continued his tormentor—"his father's old ship. 'Ow strange it'll seem to 'im following it out aboard a whaler. Life is full o' surprises, Mr. Wilks, and wot a big surprise it would be to you if you could 'ear wot he says about you when he comes to 'is senses."

"I'm obeying orders," growled the other.

"Quite right," said Mr. Smith, approvingly, as he drew a bottle of whisky from his bag and placed it on the table. "Two glasses and there we are. We don't want any salt and vinegar this time."

Mr. Wilks turned a deaf ear.

"But 'ow are you going to manage so as to make one silly and not the other?" he inquired.

"It's a trade secret," said the other; "but I don't mind telling you I sent the cap'n something to take afore he comes, and besides, I shall be in your kitchen looking arter things."

"I s'pose you know what you're about?" said Mr. Wilks, doubtfully.

"I s'pose so," rejoined the other. "Young Nugent trusts you, and, of course, he'll take anything from your 'ouse. That's the beauty of 'aving a character, Mr. Wilks; a good character and a face like a baby with grey whiskers."

Mr. Wilks bent down and, taking up a small brush, carefully tidied up the hearth.

"Like as not, if my part in it gets to be known," pursued Mr. Smith, mournfully, "I'll 'ave that gal of Kybird's scratching my eyes out or p'r'aps sticking a hat-pin into me. I had that once; the longest hat-pin that ever was made, I should think."

He shook his head over the perils of his calling, and then, after another glance at the clock, withdrew to the kitchen with his bag, leaving Mr. Wilks waiting in a state of intense nervousness for the arrival of the others.

Captain Nugent was the first to put in an appearance, and by way of setting a good example poured a little of the whisky in his glass and sat there waiting. Then Jack Nugent came in, fresh and glowing, and Mr. Wilks, after standing about helplessly for a few moments, obeyed the captain's significant nod and joined Mr. Smith in the kitchen.

"You'd better go for a walk," said that gentleman, regarding him kindly; "that's wot the cap'n thought."

Mr. Wilks acquiesced eagerly, and, tapping at the door, passed through the room again into the street. A glance as he went through showed him that Jack Nugent was drinking, and he set off in a panic to get away from the scene which he had contrived.

He slackened after a time and began to pace the streets at a rate which was less noticeable. As he passed the Kybirds' he shivered, and it was not until he had consumed a pint or two of the strongest brew procurable at the "Two Schooners" that he began to regain some of his old self-esteem. He felt almost maudlin at the sacrifice of character he was enduring for the sake of his old master, and the fact that he could not narrate it to sympathetic friends was not the least of his troubles.

The shops had closed by the time he got into the street again, and he walked down and watched with much solemnity the reflection of the lamps on the quay in the dark water of the harbour. The air was keen and the various craft distinct in the starlight. Perfect quiet reigned aboard the *Seabird*,

and after a vain attempt to screw up his courage to see the victim taken aboard he gave it up and walked back along the beach.

By the time he turned his steps homewards it was nearly eleven o'clock. Fullalove Alley was quiet, and after listening for some time at his window he turned the handle of the door and passed in. The nearly empty bottle stood on the table, and an overturned tumbler accounted for a large, dark patch on the table-cloth. As he entered the room the kitchen door opened and Mr. Nathan Smith, with a broad smile on his face, stepped briskly in.

"All over," he said, rubbing his hands; "he went off like a lamb, no trouble nor fighting. He was a example to all of us."

"Did the cap'n see 'im aboard?" inquired Mr. Wilks.

"Certainly not," said the other. "As a matter o' fact, the cap'n took a little more than I told 'im to take, and I 'ad to help 'im up to your bed. Accidents will 'appen, but he'll be all right in the morning if nobody goes near 'im. Leave 'im perfectly quiet, and when 'e comes downstairs give 'im a strong cup o' tea."

"In my bed?" repeated the staring Mr. Wilks.

"He's as right as rain," said the boarding master. "I brought down a pillow and blankets for you and put 'em in the kitchen. And now I'll take the other two pound ten and be getting off 'ome. It ought to be ten pounds really with the trouble I've 'ad."

Mr. Wilks paid the desired amount on to the table, and Mr. Nathan Smith placing it in his pocket rose to go.

"Don't disturb 'im till he's 'ad 'is sleep out, mind," he said, pausing at the door, "else I can't answer for the consequences. If 'e should get up in the night and come down raving mad, try and soothe 'im. Good night, and pleasant dreams."

He closed the door after him quietly, and the horrified steward, after fetching the bed-clothes on tiptoe from the kitchen, locked the door which led to the staircase, and after making up a bed on the floor lay down in his clothes and tried to get to sleep.

He dozed off at last, but woke up several times during the night with the cold. The lamp burnt itself out, and in the dark he listened intently for any sounds of life in the room above. Then he fell asleep again, until at about half-past

seven in the morning a loud crash overhead awoke him with a start.

In a moment he was sitting up with every faculty on the alert. Footsteps blundered about in the room above, and a large and rapidly widening patch of damp showed on the ceiling. It was evident that the sleeper, in his haste to quench an abnormal thirst, had broken the water-jug.

Mr. Wilks, shivering with dread, sprang to his feet and stood irresolute. Judging by the noise, the captain was evidently in a fine temper, and Mr. Smith's remarks about insanity occurred to him with redoubled interest. Then he heard a hoarse shout, the latch of the bedroom door clicked, and the prisoner stumbled heavily downstairs and began to fumble at the handle of the door at the bottom. Trembling with excitement, Mr. Wilks dashed forward and turned the key, and then retreating to the street door prepared for instant flight.

He opened the door so suddenly that the man on the other side, with a sudden cry, fell on all fours into the room, and, raising his face, stared stupidly at the steward. Mr. Wilks's hands dropped to his sides and his tongue refused its office, for in some strange fashion, quite in keeping with the lawless proceedings of the previous night, Captain Nugent had changed into a most excellent likeness of his own son.

CHAPTER XII.

For some time Mr. Wilks stood gazing at this unexpected apparition and trying to collect his scattered senses. Its face was pale and flabby, while its glassy eyes, set in rims of red eyelid, were beginning to express unmistakable signs of suspicion and wrath. The shock was so sudden that the steward could not even think coherently. Was the captain upstairs? And if so, what was his condition? Where was Nathan Smith? And where was the five pounds?

A voice, a husky and discordant voice, broke in upon his meditations; Jack Nugent was also curious.

"What does all this mean?" he demanded, angrily. "How did I get here?"

"You—you came downstairs," stammered Mr. Wilks, still racking his brains in the vain effort to discover how matters stood.

Mr. Nugent was about to speak, but, thinking better of it, turned and blundered into the kitchen. Sounds of splashing and puffing ensued, and the steward going to the door saw him with his head under the tap. He followed him in, and at the right time handed him a towel. Despite the disordered appearance of his hair, the improvement in Mr. Nugent's condition was so manifest that the steward, hoping for similar results, turned the tap on again and followed his example.

"Your head wants cooling, I should think," said the young man, returning him the towel. "What's it all about?"

Mr. Wilks hesitated; a bright thought occurred to him, and, murmuring something about a dry towel, he sped up the narrow stairs to his bedroom. The captain was not there. He pushed open the small lattice window and peered out into the alley; no sign of either the captain or the ingenious Mr. Nathan Smith. With a heavy heart he descended the stairs again.

"Now," said Mr. Nugent, who was sitting down with his hands in his pockets, "perhaps you'll be good enough to explain what all this means."

"You were 'ere last night," said Mr. Wilks, "you and the cap'n."

"I know that," said Nugent. "How is it I didn't go home? I didn't understand that it was an all-night invitation. Where is my father?"

The steward shook his head helplessly.

"He was 'ere when I went out last night," he said, slowly. "When I came back the room was empty, and I was told as 'e was upstairs in my bed."

"Told he was in your bed?" repeated the other. "Who told you?"

Mr. Wilks caught his breath.

"I mean I told myself 'e was in my bed," he stammered, "because when I came in I see these bed-clothes on the floor, an' I thought as the cap'n 'ad put them there for me and taken my bed 'imself."

Mr. Nugent regarded the litter of bed-clothes as though hoping that they would throw a little light on the affair, and then shot a puzzled glance at Mr. Wilks.

"Why should you think my father wanted your bed?" he inquired.

"I don't know," was the reply. "I thought p'r'aps 'e'd maybe taken a little more than 'e ought to have taken. But it's all a myst'ry to me. I'm more astonished than wot you are."

"Well, I can't make head or tail of it," said Nugent, rising and pacing the room. "I came here to meet my father. So far as I remember I had one drink of whisky—your whisky—and then I woke up in your bedroom with a splitting headache and a tongue like a piece of leather. Can you account for it?"

Mr. Wilks shook his head again.

"I wasn't here," he said, plucking up courage. "Why not go an' see your father? Seems to me 'e is the one that would know most about it."

Mr. Nugent stood for a minute considering, and then raising the latch of the door opened it slowly and inhaled the cold morning air. A subtle and delicate aroma of coffee and herrings which had escaped from neighbouring breakfast-tables invaded the room and reminded him of an appetite. He turned to go, but had barely quitted the step before he saw Mrs. Kingdom and his sister enter the alley.

Mr. Wilks saw them too, and, turning if anything a shade paler, supported himself by the doorpost. Kate Nugent quickened her pace as she saw them, and, after a surprised greeting to her brother, breathlessly informed him that the captain was missing.

"Hasn't been home all night," panted Mrs. Kingdom, joining them. "I don't know what to think."

They formed an excited little group round the steward's door, and Mr. Wilks, with an instinctive feeling that the matter was one to be discussed in private, led the way indoors. He attempted to apologise for the disordered condition of the room, but Jack Nugent, interrupting him brusquely, began to relate his own adventures of the past few hours.

Mrs. Kingdom listened to the narrative with unexpected calmness. She knew the cause of her nephew's discomfiture. It was the glass of whisky acting on a system unaccustomed to alcohol, and she gave a vivid and moving account of the effects of a stiff glass of hot rum which she had once taken for a cold. It was quite clear to her that the captain had put his son to bed; the thing to discover now was where he had put himself.

"Sam knows something about it," said her nephew, darkly; "there's something wrong."

"I know no more than a babe unborn," declared Mr. Wilks. "The last I see of the cap'n 'e was a-sitting at this table opposite you."

"Sam wouldn't hurt a fly," said Miss Nugent, with a kind glance at her favourite.

"Well, where is the governor, then?" inquired her brother. "Why didn't he go home last night? He has never stayed out before."

"Yes, he has," said Mrs. Kingdom, folding her hands in her lap. "When you were children. He came home at half-past eleven next morning, and when I asked him where he'd been he nearly bit my head off. I'd been walking the floor all night, and I shall never forget his remarks when he opened the door to the police, who'd come to say they couldn't find him. Never."

A ghostly grin flitted across the features of Mr. Wilks, but he passed the back of his hand across his mouth and became serious again as he thought of his position. He was almost dancing with anxiety to get away to Mr. Nathan Smith and ask for an explanation of the proceedings of the night before.

"I'll go and have a look round for the cap'n," he said, eagerly; "he can't be far."

"I'll come with you," said Nugent. "I should like to see him too. There are one or two little things that want explain-

ing. You take aunt home, Kate, and I'll follow on as soon as there is any news."

As he spoke the door opened a little way and a head appeared, only to be instantly withdrawn at the sight of so many people. Mr. Wilks stepped forward hastily, and throwing the door wide open revealed the interesting features of Mr. Nathan Smith.

"How do you do, Mr. Wilks?" said that gentleman, softly. "I just walked round to see whether you was in. I've got a message for you. I didn't know you'd got company."

He stepped into the room, and, tapping the steward on the chest with a confidential finger, backed him into a corner, and, having got him there, gave an expressive wink with one eye and gazed into space with the other.

"I thought you'd be alone," he said, looking round, "but p'r'aps it's just as well as it is. They've got to know, so they may as well know now as later on."

"Know what?" inquired Jack Nugent, abruptly. "What are you making that face for, Sam?"

Mr. Wilks mumbled something about a decayed tooth, and to give colour to the statement continued a series of contortions which made his face ache.

"You should take something for that tooth," said the boarding master, with great solicitude. "Wot do you say to a glass o' whisky?"

He motioned to the fatal bottle, which still stood on the table; the steward caught his breath, and then, rising to the occasion, said that he had already had a couple of glasses, and they had done no good.

"What's your message?" inquired Jack Nugent, impatiently.

"I'm just going to tell you," said Mr. Smith. "I was out early this morning, strolling down by the harbour to get a little appetite for breakfast, when who should I see coming along, looking as though 'e 'ad just come from a funeral, but Cap'n Nugent! I was going to pass 'im, but he stopped me and asked me to take a message from 'im to 'is old and faithful steward, Mr. Wilks."

"Why has he gone away?" exclaimed Mrs. Kingdom.

"His old and faithful steward," repeated Mr. Smith, motioning her to silence. "'Tell 'im,' he says, 'that I am heartily ashamed of myself for wot took place last night—and him, too. Tell 'im that, after my father's 'art proved too

much for me, I walked the streets all night, and now I can't face my injured son and family yet awhile, and I'm off to London till it has blown over.' "

"But what's it all about?" demanded Nugent. "Why don't you get to the point?"

"So far as I could make out," replied Mr. Smith, with the studious care of one who desires to give exact information, "Cap'n Nugent and Mr. Wilks 'ad a little plan for giving you a sea blow."

"*Me?*" interrupted the unfortunate steward. "Now, look 'ere, Nathan Smith——"

"Them was the cap'n's words," said the boarding master, giving him a glance of great significance; "are you going to take away or add to wot the cap'n says?"

Mr. Wilks collapsed, and avoiding the indignant eyes of the Nugent family, tried to think out his position.

"It seems from wot the cap'n told me," continued Mr. Smith, "that there was some objection to your marrying old—Mr. Kybird's gal, so 'e and Mr. Wilks, after putting their 'eads together, decided to get you 'ere and after giving you a little whisky that Mr. Wilks knows the trick of——"

"*Me?*" interrupted the unfortunate steward, again.

"Them was the cap'n's words," said Mr. Smith, coldly. "After you'd 'ad it they was going to stow you away in the *Seabird*, which sailed this morning. However, when the cap'n see you overcome, his 'art melted, and instead o' putting you aboard the whaler he took your feet and Mr. Wilks your 'ead, and after a great deal o' trouble got you upstairs and put you to bed."

"You miserable scoundrel," said the astonished Mr. Nugent, addressing the shrinking steward; "you infernal old reprobate—you—you—I didn't think you'd got it in you."

"So far as I could make out," said Mr. Smith, kindly, "Mr. Wilks was only obeying orders. It was the cap'n's plan, and Mr. Wilks was aboard ship with 'im for a very long time. O' course, he oughtn't to ha' done it, but the cap'n's a masterful man, an' I can quite understand Mr. Wilks givin' way; I dessay I should myself if I'd been in 'is place—he's all 'art, is Mr. Wilks—no 'ead."

"It's a good job for you you're an old man, Sam," said Mr. Nugent.

"I can hardly believe it of you, Sam," said Miss Nugent.

"I can hardly think you could have been so deceitful. Why, we've trusted you all our lives."

The unfortunate steward quailed beneath the severity of her glance. Even if he gave a full account of the affair it would not make his position better. It was he who had made all the arrangements with Mr. Smith, and after an indignant glance at that gentleman he lowered his gaze and remained silent.

"It is rather odd that my father should take you into his confidence," said Miss Nugent, turning to the boarding master.

"Just wot I thought, Miss," said the complaisant Mr. Smith; "but I s'pose there was nobody else, and he wanted 'is message to go for fear you should get worrying the police about 'im or something. He wants it kep' quiet, and 'is last words to me as 'e left me was, 'If this affair gets known I shall never come back. Tell 'em to keep it quiet.'"

"I don't think anybody will want to go bragging about it," said Jack Nugent, rising, "unless it is Sam Wilks. Come along, Kate."

Miss Nugent followed him obediently, only pausing at the door to give a last glance of mingled surprise and reproach at Mr. Wilks. Then they were outside and the door closed behind them.

"Well, that's all right," said Mr. Smith, easily.

"All right!" vociferated the steward. "Wot did you put it all on to me for? Why didn't you tell 'em your part in it?"

"Wouldn't ha' done any good," said Mr. Smith; "wouldn't ha' done *you* any good. Besides, I did just wot the cap'n told me."

"When's he coming back?" inquired the steward.

Mr. Smith shook his head.

"Couldn't say," he returned. "He couldn't say 'imself. Between you an' me, I expect 'e's gone up to have a reg'lar fair spree."

"Why did you tell me last night he was upstairs?" inquired the other.

"Cap'n's orders," repeated Mr. Smith, with relish. "Ask 'im, not me. As a matter o' fact, he spent the night at my place and went off this morning."

"An' wot about the five pounds?" inquired Mr. Wilks, spitefully. "You ain't earned it."

"I know I ain't," said Mr. Smith, mournfully. "That's

wot's worrying me. It's like a gnawing pain in my side. D'you think it's conscience biting of me? I never felt it before. Or d'ye think it's sorrow to think that I've done the whole job too cheap? You think it out and let me know later on. So long."

He waved his hand cheerily to the steward and departed. Mr. Wilks threw himself into a chair, and, ignoring the cold and the general air of desolation of his best room, gave way to a fit of melancholy which would have made Mr. Edward Silk green with envy.

CHAPTER XIII.

Days passed, but no word came from the missing captain, and only the determined opposition of Kate Nugent kept her aunt from advertising in the "Agony" column of the London Press. Miss Nugent was quite as desirous of secrecy in the affair as her father, and it was a source of great annoyance to her when, in some mysterious manner, it leaked out. In a very short time the news was common property, and Mr. Wilks, appearing to his neighbours in an entirely new character, was besieged for information.

His own friends were the most tiresome, their open admiration of his lawlessness and their readiness to trace other mysterious disappearances to his agency being particularly galling to a man whose respectability formed his most cherished possession. Other people regarded the affair as a joke, and he sat gazing round-eyed one evening in the "Two Schooners" at the insensible figures of three men who had each had a modest half-pint at his expense. It was a pretty conceit and well played, but the steward, owing to the frenzied efforts of one of the sleepers whom he had awakened with a quart pot, did not stay to admire it. He finished up the evening at "The Chequers," and after getting wet through on the way home fell asleep in his wet clothes before the dying fire.

He awoke with a bad cold and pains in the limbs. A headache was not unexpected, but the other symptoms were. With

HE FINISHED UP THE EVENING AT "THE CHEQUERS."

p. 92.

trembling hands he managed to light a fire and prepare a breakfast, which he left untouched. This last symptom was the most alarming of all, and going to the door he bribed a small boy with a penny to go for Dr. Murchison, and sat cowering over the fire until he came.

"Well, you've got a bad cold," said the doctor, after examining him. "You'd better get to bed for the present. You'll be safe there."

"Is it dangerous?" faltered the steward.

"And keep yourself warm," said the doctor, who was not in the habit of taking his patients into his confidence. "I'll send round some medicine."

"I should like Miss Nugent to know I'm bad," said Mr. Wilks, in a weak voice.

"She knows that," replied Murchison. "She was telling me about you the other day."

He put his hand up to his neat black moustache to hide a smile, and met the steward's indignant gaze without flinching.

"I mean ill," said the latter, sharply.

"Oh, yes," said the other. "Well, you get to bed now. Good morning."

He took up his hat and stick and departed. Mr. Wilks sat for a little while over the fire, and then, rising, hobbled slowly upstairs to bed and forgot his troubles in sleep.

He slept until the afternoon, and then, raising himself in bed, listened to the sounds of stealthy sweeping in the room below. Chairs were being moved about, and the tinkle of ornaments on the mantelpiece announced that dusting operations were in progress. He lay down again with a satisfied smile; it was like a tale in a story-book: the faithful old servant and his master's daughter. He closed his eyes as he heard her coming upstairs.

"Ah, pore dear!" said a voice.

Mr. Wilks opened his eyes sharply and beheld the meagre figure of Mrs. Silk. In one hand she held a medicine bottle and a glass, and in the other paper and firewood.

"I only 'eard of it half an hour ago," she said, reproachfully. "I saw the doctor's boy, and I left my work and came over at once. Why didn't you let me know?"

Mr. Wilks muttered that he didn't know, and lay crossly regarding his attentive neighbour as she knelt down and daintily lit the fire. This task finished, she proceeded to

make the room tidy, and then set about making beef-tea in a little saucepan.

"You lay still and get well," she remarked, with tender playfulness. "That's all you've got to do. Me and Teddy'll look after you."

"I couldn't think of troubling you," said the steward, earnestly.

"It's no trouble," was the reply. "You don't think I'd leave you here alone helpless, do you?"

"I was going to send for old Mrs. Jackson if I didn't get well to-day," said Mr. Wilks.

Mrs. Silk shook her head at him, and, after punching up his pillow, took an easy-chair by the fire and sat there musing. Mr. Edward Silk came in at tea-time, and, after remarking that Mr. Wilks was very flushed and had got a nasty look about the eyes, and a cough which he didn't like, fell to discoursing on death-beds.

"Good nursing is the principal thing," said his mother. "I nursed my pore dear 'usband all through his last illness. He couldn't bear me to be out of the room. I nursed my mother right up to the last, and your pore Aunt Jane went off in my arms."

Mr. Wilks raised himself on his elbow, and his eyes shone feverishly in the lamplight.

"I think I'll get a 'ospital nurse to-morrow," he said, decidedly.

"Nonsense," said Mrs. Silk. "It's no trouble to me at all. I like nursing; always did."

Mr. Wilks lay back again, and, closing his eyes, determined to ask the doctor to provide a duly qualified nurse on the morrow. To his disappointment, however, the doctor failed to come, and although he felt much better Mrs. Silk sternly negatived a desire on his part to get up.

"Not till the doctor's been," she said, firmly. "I couldn't think of it."

"I don't believe there's anything the matter with me now," he declared.

"'Ow odd—'ow very odd that you should say that!" said Mrs. Silk, clasping her hands.

"Odd!" repeated the steward, somewhat crustily. "How do you mean—odd?"

"They was the very last words my Uncle Benjamin ever uttered in this life," said Mrs. Silk, with dramatic impressivenes.

The steward was silent; then, with the ominous precedent of Uncle Benjamin before him, he began to talk until scores of words stood between himself and a similar ending.

"Teddy asked to be remembered to you as 'e went off this morning," said Mrs. Silk, pausing in her labours at the grate.

"I'm much obliged," muttered the invalid.

"He didn't 'ave time to come in," pursued the widow. "You can 'ardly believe what a lot 'e thinks of you, Mr. Wilks. The last words he said to me was, 'Let me know at once if there's any change.'"

Mr. Wilks distinctly felt a cold, clammy sensation down his spine, and little quivering thrills ran up and down his legs. He glared indignantly at the back of the industrious Mrs. Silk.

"Teddy's very fond of you," continued the unconscious woman. "I s'pose it's not 'aving a father, but he seems to me to think more of you than anybody else in the wide, wide world. I get quite jealous sometimes. Only the other day I said to 'im, joking like, 'Well, you'd better go and live with 'im if you're so fond of 'im,' I said."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Mr. Wilks, uneasily.

"You'll never guess what 'e said then," said Mrs. Silk, dropping her dustpan and brush and gazing at the hearth.

"Said 'e couldn't leave you, I s'pose," guessed the steward, gruffly.

"Well, now," exclaimed Mrs. Silk, clapping her hands, "if you 'aven't nearly guessed it! Well, there! I never did! I wouldn't have told you for anything if you 'adn't said that. The *exact* words what 'e did say was, 'Not without you, mother.'"

Mr. Wilks closed his eyes with a snap, and his heart turned to water. He held his breath and ransacked his brain in vain for a reply which should ignore the inner meaning of the fatal words. Something careless and jocular he wanted, combined with a voice which should be under perfect control. Failing these things, he kept his eyes closed, and, very wide-awake indeed, feigned sleep. He slept straight away from eleven o'clock in the morning until Edward Silk came in at seven o'clock in the evening.

"I feel like a new man," he said, rubbing his eyes and yawning.

"I don't see no change in your appearance," said the comforting youth.

"'E's much better," declared his mother. "that's what comes o' good nursing; some nurses would 'ave woke 'im up to take food, but I just let 'im sleep on. People don't feel hunger while they're asleep."

She busied herself over the preparation of a basin of arrowroot, and the steward, despite his distaste for this dish, devoured it in a twinkling. Beef-tea and a glass of milk in addition failed to take more than the edge off his appetite.

"We shall pull 'im through," said Mrs. Silk, smiling, as she put down the empty glass. "In a fortnight he'll be on 'is feet."

It is a matter of history that Mr. Wilks was on his feet at five o'clock the next morning, and not only on his feet but dressed and ready for a journey after such a breakfast as he had not made for many a day. The discourtesy involved in the disregard of the doctor's instructions did not trouble him, and he smirked with some satisfaction as he noiselessly closed his door behind him and looked at the drawn blinds opposite. The stars were paling as he quitted the alley and made his way to the railway station. A note on his tumbled pillow, after thanking Mrs. Silk for her care of him, informed her that he was quite well and had gone to London in search of the missing captain.

Hardy, who had heard from Edward Silk of the steward's indisposition, and had been intending to pay him a visit, learnt of his departure later on in the morning, and, being ignorant of the particulars, discoursed somewhat eloquently to his partner on the old man's devotion.

"H'm, may be," said Swann, taking off his glasses and looking at him. "But you don't think Captain Nugent is in London, do you?"

"Why not?" inquired Hardy, somewhat startled.

"If what Wilks told you is true, Nathan Smith knows," said the other. "I'll ask him."

"You don't expect to get the truth out of him, do you?" inquired Hardy, superciliously.

"I do," said his partner, serenely; "and when I've got it I shall go and tell them at Equator Lodge. It will be doing those two poor ladies a service to let them know what has really happened to the captain."

"I'll walk round to Nathan Smith's with you," said Hardy. "I should like to hear what the fellow has to say."

"No, I'll go alone," said his partner; "Smith's a very shy

man—painfully shy. I've run across him once or twice before. He's almost as bashful and retiring as you are."

Hardy grunted.

"If the captain isn't in London, where is he?" he inquired.

The other shook his head.

"I've got an idea," he replied, "but I want to make sure. Kybird and Smith are old friends, as Nugent might have known, only he was always too high and mighty to take any interest in his inferiors. There's something for you to go on."

He bent over his desk again and worked steadily until one o'clock—his hour for lunching. Then he put on his hat and coat, and after a comfortable meal, sallied out in search of Mr. Smith.

The boarding-house, an old and dilapidated building, was in a by-street convenient to the harbour. The front door stood open, and a couple of seamen lounging on the broken steps made way for him civilly as he entered and rapped on the bare boards with his stick. Mr. Smith, clattering down the stairs in response, had some difficulty in concealing his surprise at the visit, but entered genially into a conversation about the weather, a subject in which he was much interested. When the shipbroker began to discuss the object of his visit, he led him to a small sitting-room at the back of the house and repeated the information he had given to Mr. Wilks.

"That's all there is to tell," he concluded, artlessly; "the cap'n was that ashamed of hisself, he's laying low for a bit. We all make mistakes sometimes; I do myself."

"I am much obliged to you," said Mr. Swann, gratefully.

"You're quite welcome, sir," said the boarding master.

"And now," said the visitor, musingly—"now for the police."

"Police!" repeated Mr. Smith, almost hastily. "What for?"

"Why, to find the captain," said Mr. Swann, in a surprised voice.

Mr. Smith shook his head.

"You'll offend the cap'n bitter if you go to the police about 'im, sir," he declared. "His last words to me was, 'Smith, 'ave this kept quiet.'"

"It'll be a little job for the police," urged the shipbroker.

"They don't have much to do down here; they'll be as pleased as possible."

"They'll worry your life out of you, sir," said the other. "You don't know what they are."

"I like a little excitement," returned Mr. Swann. "I don't suppose they'll trouble me much, but they'll turn your place topsy-turvy, I expect. Still, that can't be helped. You know what fools the police are; they'll think you've murdered the captain and hidden his body under the boards. They'll have all the floors up. Ha, ha, ha!"

"'Aving floors up don't seem to me to be so amusing as wot it does to you," remarked Mr. Smith, coldly.

"They may find all sorts of treasure for you," continued the visitor. "It's a very old house, Smith, and there may be bags of guineas hidden away under the flooring. You may be able to retire."

"You're a gentleman 'as is fond of his joke, Mr. Swann," returned the boarding master, lugubriously. "I wish I'd got that 'appy way of looking at things you 'ave."

"I'm not joking, Smith," said the other, quietly.

Mr. Smith pondered, and, stealing a side-glance at him, stood scraping his foot along the floor.

"There ain't nothing much to tell," he grumbled, "and, mind, the worst favour you could do to the cap'n would be to put it about how he was done. He's gone for a little trip instead of 'is son, that's all."

"Little trip!" shouted the other; "you call a whaling cruise a little trip?"

"No, no, sir," said Mr. Smith, in a shocked voice, "I ain't so bad as that; I've got some 'art, I hope. He's just gone for a little trip with 'is old pal Hardy on the *Conqueror*. Kybird's idea it was."

To Mr. Smith's great surprise his visitor sat down suddenly and began to laugh. Tears of honest mirth suffused his eyes and dimmed his glasses. Mr. Smith, regarding him with an air of kindly interest, began to laugh to keep him company.

"Don't you know it's punishable?" demanded the ship-broker, recovering.

Mr. Smith shook his head and became serious.

"The cap'n fell into 'is own trap," he said, slowly. "There's no lor for 'im! He'd only get laughed at. The idea of trying to get me to put little Amelia Kybird's young man away. Why, I was 'er godfather."

Mr. Swann stared at him, and then, with a friendly "good morning," departed. Halfway along the passage he stopped, and retracing his steps produced his cigar-case and offered the astonished boarding master a cigar.

"I s'pose," said that gentleman, as he watched the other's retreating figure and dubiously smelt the cigar, "I s'pose it's all right; but he's a larky sort, and I 'ave heard of 'em exploding. I'll give it to Kybird, in case."

CHAPTER XIV.

Captain Nugent awoke the morning after his attempt to crimp his son with a bad headache. Not an ordinary headache, to disappear with a little cold water and fresh air; but a splitting, racking affair, which made him feel all head and dulness. Weights pressed upon his eyelids, and the back of his head seemed glued to his pillow.

He groaned faintly, and, raising himself upon his elbow, opened his eyes and sat up with a sharp exclamation. His bed was higher from the floor than usual, and, moreover, the floor was different. In the dim light he distinctly saw a ship's forecastle, untidy bunks with frouzy bedclothes, and shiny oilskins hanging from the bulkhead.

For a few moments he stared about in mystification; he was certainly ill, and no doubt the forecastle was a hallucination. It was a strange symptom, and the odd part of it was that everything was so distinct. Even the smell. He stared harder, in the hope that his surroundings would give place to the usual ones, and, leaning a little bit more on his elbow, nearly rolled out of the bunk. Resolved to probe this mystery to the bottom, he lowered himself to the floor and felt distinctly the motion of a ship at sea.

There was no doubt about it. He staggered to the door, and, holding by the side, looked on to the deck. The steamer was rolling in a fresh sea, and a sweet strong wind blew refreshingly into his face. Funnels, bridge, and masts swung with a rhythmical motion; loose gear rattled, and every now

and then a distant tinkle sounded faintly from the steward's pantry.

He stood bewildered, trying to piece together the events of the preceding night, and to try and understand by what miracle he was back on board his old ship the *Conqueror*. There was no doubt as to her identity. He knew every inch of her, and any further confirmation that might be required was fully supplied by the appearance of the long, lean figure of Captain Hardy on the bridge.

Captain Nugent took his breath sharply, and began to realise the situation. He stepped to the side and looked over; the harbour was only a little way astern, and Sunwich itself looking cold and cheerless beyond the dirty, tumbling seas, little more than a mile distant.

At the sight his spirits revived, and with a hoarse cry he ran shouting towards the bridge. Captain Hardy turned sharply at the noise, and recognising the intruder stood peering down at him in undisguised amazement.

"Put back," shouted Nugent, waving up at him. "Put back."

"What on earth are you doing on my ship?" inquired the astonished Hardy.

"Put me ashore," cried Nugent, imperiously; "don't waste time talking. D'ye hear? Put me ashore."

The amazement died out of Hardy's face and gave way to an expression of anger. For a time he regarded the red and threatening visage of Captain Nugent in silence, then he turned to the second officer.

"This man is not one of the crew, Mr. Prowle?" he said, in a puzzled voice.

"No, sir," said Mr. Prowle.

"How did he get aboard here?"

Captain Nugent answered the question himself.

"I was crimped by you and your drunken bullies," he said, sternly.

"How did this man get aboard here?" repeated Captain Hardy, ignoring him.

"He must have concealed himself somewhere, sir," said the mate; "this is the first I've seen of him."

"A stowaway?" said the captain, bending his brows. "He must have got some of the crew to hide him aboard. You'd better make a clean breast of it, my lad. Who are your confederates?"

Captain Nugent shook with fury. The second mate had

turned away, with his hand over his mouth and a suspicious hunching of his shoulders, while the steward, who had been standing by, beat a hasty retreat and collapsed behind the chart-room.

"If you don't put me ashore," said Nugent, restraining his passion by a strong effort, "I'll take proceedings against you for crimping me, the moment I reach port. Get a boat out and put me aboard that smack."

He pointed as he spoke to a smack which was just on their beam, making slowly for the harbour.

"When you've done issuing orders," said the captain, in an indifferent voice, "perhaps you'll explain what you are doing aboard my craft."

Captain Nugent gazed at the stern of the receding smack; Sunwich was getting dim in the distance, and there was no other sail near. He began to realise that he was in for a long voyage.

"I awoke this morning and found myself in a bunk in your fo'c's'le," he said, regarding Hardy steadily. "How I got there is probably best known to yourself. I hold you responsible for the affair."

"Look here, my lad," said Captain Hardy, in patronising tones, "I don't know how you got aboard my ship, and I don't care. I am willing to believe that it was not intentional on your part, but either the outcome of a drunken freak or else a means of escaping from some scrape you have got into ashore. That being so, I shall take a merciful view of it, and if you behave yourself and make yourself useful you will not hear anything more of it. He has something the look of a seafaring man, Mr. Prowle. See what you can make of him."

"Come along with me, my lad," said the grinning Mr. Prowle, tapping him on the shoulder.

The captain turned with a snarl, and, clenching his huge, horny fist, let drive full in the other's face, and knocked him off his feet.

"Take that man for'ard," cried Captain Hardy, sharply. "Take him for'ard."

Half a dozen willing men sprang forward. Captain Nugent's views concerning sailormen were well known in Sunwich, and two of the men present had served under him. He went forward, the centre of an attentive and rotating circle, and, sadly out of breath, was bestowed in the forecastle and urged to listen to reason.

For the remainder of the morning he made no sign. The land was almost out of sight, and he sat down quietly to consider his course of action for the next few weeks. Dinner-time found him still engrossed in thought, and the way in which he received an intimation from a good-natured seaman that his dinner was getting cold showed that his spirits were still unquelled.

By the time afternoon came he was faint with hunger, and, having determined upon his course of action, he sent a fairly polite message to Captain Hardy and asked for an interview.

The captain, who was resting from his labours in the chart-room, received him with the same air of cold severity which had so endeared Captain Nugent himself to his subordinates.

"You have come to explain your extraordinary behaviour of this morning, I suppose?" he said, curtly.

"I have come to secure a berth aft," said Captain Nugent. "I will pay a small deposit now, and you will, of course, have the balance as soon as we get back. This is without prejudice to any action I may bring against you later on."

"Oh, indeed," said the other, raising his eyebrows. "We don't take passengers."

"I am here against my will," said Captain Nugent, "and I demand the treatment due to my position."

"If I had treated you properly," said Captain Hardy, "I should have put you in irons for knocking down my second officer. I know nothing about you or your position. You're a stowaway, and you must do the best you can in the circumstances."

"Are you going to give me a cabin?" demanded the other, menacingly.

"Certainly not," said Captain Hardy. "I have been making inquiries, and I find that you have only yourself to thank for the position in which you find yourself. I am sorry to be harsh with you."

"Harsh?" repeated the other, hardly able to believe his ears. "You harsh to me?"

"But it is for your own good," pursued Captain Hardy; "it is no pleasure to me to punish you. I shall keep an eye on you while you're aboard, and if I see that your conduct is improving you will find that I am not a hard man to get on with."

"YOU KEEP ON, NUGENT—DON'T YOU MIND 'IM!"

p. 103.

Captain Nugent stared at him with his lips parted. Three times he essayed to speak and failed; then he turned sharply, and, gaining the open air, stood for some time trying to regain his composure before going forward again. The first mate, who was on the bridge, regarded him curiously, and then, with an insufferable air of authority, ordered him away.

The captain obeyed mechanically, and, turning a deaf ear to the inquiries of the men, prepared to make the best of an intolerable situation, and began to cleanse his bunk. First of all he took out the bedding and shook it thoroughly, and then, procuring soap and a bucket of water, began to scrub with a will. Hostile comments followed the action.

"We ain't clean enough for 'im," said one voice.

"Partikler old party, ain't he, Bill?" said another.

"You leave 'im alone," said the man addressed, surveying the captain's efforts with a smile of approval. "You keep on, Nugent; don't you mind 'im. There's a little bit there you ain't done."

"Keep your head out of the way, unless you want it knocked off," said the incensed captain.

"Ho!" said the aggrieved Bill. "Ho, indeed! D'ye 'ear that, mates? A man mustn't look at 'is own bunk now."

The captain turned as though he had been stung.

"This is my bunk," he said, sharply.

"Ho, is it?" said Bill. "Beggin' of your pardon, an' apologising for a-contradictin' of you, but it's mine. You haven't got no bunk."

"I slept in it last night," said the captain, conclusively.

"I know you did," said Bill, "but that was all my kind-'artedness."

"And 'arf a quid, Bill," a voice reminded him.

"And 'arf a quid," assented Bill, graciously, "and I'm very much obliged to you, mate, for the careful and tidy way in which you've cleaned up arter yourself."

The captain eyed him. Many years of command at sea had given him a fine manner, and force of habit was for a moment almost too much for Bill and his friends. But only for a moment.

"I'm going to keep this bunk," said the captain, deliberately.

"No, you ain't, mate," said Bill, shaking his head; "don't you believe it. You're nobody down here; not even a ordinary seaman. I'm afraid you'll 'ave to clean

a place for yourself on the carpet. There's a nice corner over there."

"When I get back," said the furious captain, "some of you will go to gaol for last night's work."

"Don't be hard on us," said a mocking voice, "we did our best. It ain't our fault that you look so ridikerlously young that we took you for your own son."

"And you was in that state that you couldn't contradict us," said another man.

"If it is your bunk," said the captain, sternly, "I suppose you have a right to it. But perhaps you'll sell it to me? How much?"

"Now you're talking business," said the highly gratified Bill, turning with a threatening gesture upon a speculator opposite. "Wot do you say to a couple o' pounds?"

The captain nodded.

"Couple o' pounds, money down," said Bill, holding out his hand.

The captain examined the contents of his pocket, and, after considerable friction, bought the bunk for a pound cash and an I O U for the balance.

A more humane man would have shown a little concern as to his benefactor's sleeping-place; but the captain never gave the matter a thought. In fact, it was not until three days later that he discovered there was a spare bunk in the forecastle, and that the unscrupulous seaman was occupying it.

It was only one of many annoyances, but the captain realising his impotence made no sign. From certain remarks let fall in his hearing he had no difficulty in connecting Mr. Kybird with his discomfiture, and, of his own accord, he freely included the unfortunate Mr. Wilks.

He passed his time in devising schemes of vengeance, and when Captain Hardy, relenting, offered him a cabin aft, he sent back such a message of refusal that the steward spent half an hour preparing a paraphrase. The offer was not repeated, and the captain, despite the strong representations of Bill and his friends, continued to eat the bread of idleness before the mast.

CHAPTER XV.

MR. ADOLPHUS SWANN spent a very agreeable afternoon after his interview with Nathan Smith in refusing to satisfy what he termed the idle curiosity of his partner. The secret of Captain Nugent's whereabouts, he declared, was not to be told to everybody, but was to be confided by a man of insinuating address and appearance (here he looked at himself in a hand-glass) to Miss Nugent. To be broken to her by a man with no ulterior motives for his visit; a man in the prime of life, but not too old for a little tender sympathy.

"I had hoped to have gone this afternoon," he said, with a glance at the clock; "but I'm afraid I can't get away. Have you got much to do, Hardy?"

"No," said his partner, briskly. "I've finished."

"Then perhaps you wouldn't mind doing my work for me, so that I can go?" said Mr. Swann, mildly.

Hardy played with his pen. The senior partner had been amusing himself at his expense for some time, and in the hope of a favour at his hands he had endured it with unusual patience.

"Four o'clock," murmured the senior partner; "hadn't you better see about making yourself presentable, Hardy?"

"Thanks," said the other, with alacrity, as he took off his coat and crossed over to the little washstand.

In five minutes he had finished his toilet, and, giving his partner a little friendly pat on the shoulder, locked up his desk.

"Well?" he said, at last.

"Well?" repeated Mr. Swann, with a little surprise.

"What am I to tell them?" inquired Hardy, struggling to keep his temper.

"Tell them?" repeated the innocent Swann. "Lor' bless my soul, how you do jump at conclusions, Hardy! I only asked you to tidy yourself for my sake. I have an artistic eye. I thought you had done it to please me."

"When you're tired of this nonsense," said the indignant Hardy, "I shall be glad."

Mr. Swann looked him over carefully, and, coming to the conclusion that his patience was exhausted, told him the result of his inquiries. His immediate reward was the utter incredulity of Mr. Hardy, together with some pungent criticisms of

his veracity. When the young man did realise at last that he was speaking the truth he fell to wondering blankly what was happening aboard the *Conqueror*.

"Never mind about that," said the older man. "For a few weeks you have got a clear field. It is quite a bond between you; both your fathers on the same ship. But whatever you do, don't remind her of the fate of the Kilkenny cats. Draw a fancy picture of the two fathers sitting with their arms about each other's waists and wondering whether their children——"

Hardy left hurriedly, in fear that his indignation at such frivolity should overcome his gratitude, and he regretted as he walked briskly along that the diffidence peculiar to young men in his circumstances had prevented him from acquainting his father with the state of his feelings towards Kate Nugent.

The idea of benefiting by the captain's enforced absence had occurred to other people besides Mr. James Hardy. Dr. Murchison, who had found the captain, despite his bias in his favour, a particularly tiresome third, was taking the fullest advantage of it; and Mrs. Kybird had also judged it an admirable opportunity for paying a first call. Mr. Kybird, who had not taken her into his confidence in the affair, protested in vain; the lady was determined, and, moreover, had the warm support of her daughter.

"I know what I'm doing, Dan'l," she said to her husband.

Mr. Kybird doubted it, but held his peace; and the objections of Jack Nugent, who found to his dismay that he was to be of the party, were deemed too trivial to be worthy of serious consideration.

They started shortly after Jem Hardy had left his office, despite the fact that Mrs. Kybird, who was troubled with asthma, was suffering untold agonies in a black satin dress which had been originally made for a much smaller woman, and had come into her husband's hands in the way of business. It got into hers in what the defrauded Mr. Kybird considered an extremely unbusiness-like manner, and it was not without a certain amount of satisfaction that he regarded her discomfort as the party sallied out.

Mr. Nugent was not happy. Mrs. Kybird in the snug seclusion of the back parlour was one thing; Mrs. Kybird in black satin at its utmost tension and a circular hat set with sable ostrich plumes nodding in the breeze

was another. He felt that the public eye was upon them and that it twinkled. His gaze wandered from mother to daughter.

"What are you staring at?" demanded Miss Kybird, pertly.

"I was thinking how well you are looking," was the reply.

Miss Kybird smiled. She had hoisted some daring colours, but she was of a bold type, and carried them fairly well.

"If I 'ad the woman what made this dress 'ere," gasped Mrs. Kybird, as she stopped with her hand on her side, "I'd give her a bit o' my mind."

"I never saw you look so well in anything before, ma," said her daughter.

Mrs. Kybird smiled faintly and continued her pilgrimage. Jem Hardy coming up rapidly behind composed his amused features and stepped into the road to pass.

"Halloa, Hardy," said Nugent. "Going home?"

"I am calling on your sister," said Hardy, bowing.

"By Jove, so are we!" said Nugent, relieved to find this friend in need. "We'll go together. You know Mrs. Kybird and Miss Kybird? That is *Mrs.* Kybird."

Mrs. Kybird bade him "Go along, do," and acknowledged the introduction with as stately a bow as the black satin would permit, and before the dazed Jem quite knew how it all happened he was leading the way with Mrs. Kybird, while the young people, as she called them, followed behind.

"We ain't looking at you," she said, playfully, over her shoulder.

"And we're trying to shut our eyes to your goings on," retorted Nugent.

Mrs. Kybird stopped, and, with a half-turn, playfully reached for him with her umbrella. The exertion and the joke combined took the remnant of her breath away, and she stood still, panting.

"You had better take Hardy's arm, I think," said Nugent, with affected solicitude.

"It's my breath," explained Mrs. Kybird, turning to the fuming young man by her side. "I can 'ardly get along for it —I'm much obliged to you, I'm sure."

Mr. Hardy, with a vain attempt to catch Jack Nugent's eye, resigned himself to his fate, and with his fair burden

on his arm walked with painful slowness towards Equator Lodge. A ribald voice from the other side of the road, addressing his companion as "Mother Kybird," told her not to hug the man, and a small boy whom they met loudly asseverated his firm intention of going straight off to tell Mr. Kybird.

By the time they reached the house Mr. Hardy entertained views on homicide which would have appeared impossible to him half an hour before. He flushed crimson as he saw the astonished face of Kate Nugent at the window, and, pausing at the gate to wait for the others, discovered that they had disappeared. A rooted dislike to scenes of any kind, together with a keen eye for the ludicrous, had prompted Jack Nugent to suggest a pleasant stroll to Amelia and put in an appearance later on.

"We won't wait for 'em," said Mrs. Kybird, with decision; "if I don't get a sit down soon I shall drop."

Still clinging to the reluctant Hardy she walked up the path; farther back in the darkness of the room the unfortunate young gentleman saw the faces of Dr. Murchison and Mrs. Kingdom.

"And 'ow are you, Bella?" inquired Mrs. Kybird, with kindly condescension. "Is Mrs. Kingdom at 'ome?"

She pushed her way past the astonished Bella, and, followed by Mr. Hardy, entered the room. Mrs. Kingdom, with a red spot on each cheek, rose to receive them.

"I ought to 'ave come before," said Mrs. Kybird, subsiding thankfully into a chair, "but I'm such a bad walker. I 'ope I see you well."

"We are very well, thank you," said Mrs. Kingdom, stiffly.

"That's right," said her visitor, cordially; "what a blessing 'ealth is. What should we do without it, I wonder?"

She leaned back in her chair and shook her head at the prospect. There was an awkward lull, and in the offended gaze of Miss Nugent Mr. Hardy saw only too plainly that he was held responsible for the appearance of the unwelcome visitor.

"I was coming to see you," he said, leaving his chair and taking one near her. "I met your brother coming along, and he introduced me to Mrs. Kybird and her daughter, and suggested we should come together."

Miss Nugent received the information with a civil bow,

and renewed her conversation with Dr. Murchison, whose face showed such a keen appreciation of the situation that Hardy had some difficulty in masking his feelings.

"They're a long time a-coming," said Mrs. Kybird, smiling archly; "but there, when young people are keeping company they forget everything and everybody. They didn't trouble about me; if it 'adn't been for Mr. 'Ardy giving me 'is arm I should never 'ave got here."

There was a prolonged silence. Dr. Murchison gave a whimsical glance at Miss Nugent, and meeting no response in that lady's indignant eyes, stroked his moustache and waited events.

"It looks as though your brother is not coming," said Hardy to Miss Nugent.

"He'll turn up by and bye," interposed Mrs. Kybird, looking somewhat morosely at the company. "They don't notice 'ow the time flies, that's all."

"Time does go," murmured Mrs. Kingdom, with a glance at the clock.

Mrs. Kybird started.

"Ah, and we notice it too, ma'am, at our age," she said, sweetly, as she settled herself in her chair and clasped her hands in her lap. "I can't 'elp looking at you, my dear," she continued, looking over at Miss Nugent. "There's such a wonderful likeness between Jack and you. Don't you think so, ma'am?"

Mrs. Kingdom, in a freezing voice, said that she had not noticed it.

"Of course," said Mrs. Kybird, glancing at her from the corner of her eye, "Jack has 'ad to rough it, pore feller, and that's left its mark on 'im. I'm sure, when we took 'im in, he was quite done up, so to speak. He'd only got what 'e stood up in, and the only pair of socks he'd got to his feet was in such a state of 'oles that they had to be throwed away. I throwed 'em away myself."

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Kingdom.

"He don't look like the same feller now," continued the amiable Mrs. Kybird; "good living and good clothes 'ave worked wonders in 'im. I'm sure if he'd been my own son I couldn't 'ave done more for 'im, and, as for Kybird, he's like a father to him."

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Kingdom, again.

Mrs. Kybird looked at her. It was on the tip of her tongue to call her a poll parrot. She was a free-spoken woman as a

rule, and it was terrible to have to sit still and waste all the good things she could have said to her in favour of unsatisfying pin-pricks. She sat smouldering.

"I s'pose you miss the capt'in very much?" she said, at last.

"Very much," was the reply.

"And I should think 'e misses you," retorted Mrs. Kybird, unable to restrain herself; "'e must miss your conversation and, what I might call, your liveliness."

Mrs. Kingdom turned and regarded her, and the red stole back to her cheeks. She smoothed down her dress, and her hands trembled. Both ladies were now regarding each other in a fashion which caused serious apprehension to the rest of the company.

"I am not a great talker, but I am very careful whom I converse with," said Mrs. Kingdom, in her most stately manner.

"I knew a lady like that once," said Mrs. Kybird; "leastways, she wasn't a lady," she added, meditatively.

Mrs. Kingdom fidgeted, and looked over piteously at her niece; Mrs. Kybird, with a satisfied sniff, sat bolt upright and meditated further assaults. There were at least a score of things she could have said about her adversary's cap alone: plain, straightforward remarks which would have torn it to shreds. The cap fascinated her, and her fingers itched as she gazed at it. In more congenial surroundings she might have snatched at it, but, being a woman of strong character, she suppressed her natural instincts, and confined herself to more polite methods of attack.

"Your nephew don't seem to be in no hurry," she remarked, at length; "but there, direckly 'e gets along o' my daughter 'e forgits everything and everybody."

"I really don't think he is coming," said Hardy, moved to speech by the glances of Miss Nugent.

"I shall give him a little longer," said Mrs. Kybird. "I only came 'ere to please 'im, and to get 'ome alone is more than I can do."

Miss Nugent looked at Mr. Hardy, and her eyes were soft and expressive. As plainly as eyes could speak they asked him to take Mrs. Kybird home, lest worse things should happen.

"Would it be far out of your way?" she asked, in a low voice.

"Quite the opposite direction," returned Mr. Hardy, firmly.

"How I got 'ere I don't know," said Mrs. Kybird, addressing the room in general; "it's a wonder to me. Well, once is enough in a lifetime."

"Mr. Hardy," said Kate Nugent, again in a low voice, "I should be so much obliged if you would take Mrs. Kybird away. She seems bent on quarrelling with my aunt. It is very awkward."

It was difficult to resist the entreaty, but Mr. Hardy had a very fair idea of the duration of Miss Nugent's gratitude; and, besides that, Murchison was only too plainly enjoying his discomfiture.

"She can get home alone all right," he whispered.

Miss Nugent drew herself up disdainfully; Dr. Murchison, looking scandalised at his brusqueness, hastened to the rescue.

"As a medical man," he said, with a considerable appearance of gravity, "I don't think that Mrs. Kybird ought to go home alone."

"Think not?" inquired Hardy, grimly.

"Certain of it," breathed the doctor.

"Well, why don't you take her?" retorted Hardy; "it's all on your way. I have some news for Miss Nugent."

Miss Nugent looked from one to the other, and mischievous lights appeared in her eyes as she gazed at the carefully groomed and fastidious Murchison. From them she looked to the other side of the room, where Mrs. Kybird was stolidly eyeing Mrs. Kingdom, who was trying in vain to appear ignorant of the fact.

"Thank you very much," said Miss Nugent, turning to the doctor.

"I'm sorry," began Murchison, with an indignant glance at his rival.

"Oh, as you please," said the girl, coldly. "Pray forgive me for asking you."

"If you really wish it," said the doctor, rising.

Miss Nugent smiled upon him, and Hardy also gave him a smile of kindly encouragement, but this he ignored. He crossed the room and bade Mrs. Kingdom good-bye; and then in a few disjointed words asked Mrs. Kybird whether he could be of any assistance in seeing her home.

"I'm sure I'm much obliged to you," said that lady, as she rose. "It don't seem much use for me waiting for my future son-in-law. I wish you good afternoon, ma'am. I can understand now why Jack didn't come."

With this parting shot she quitted the room, and, leaning

on the doctor's arm, sailed majestically down the path to the gate, every feather of her hat trembling in response to the excitement below.

"Good-natured of him," said Hardy, glancing from the window, with a triumphant smile.

"Very," said Miss Nugent, coldly, as she took a seat by her aunt. "What is the news to which you referred just now? Is it about my father?"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE two ladies received Mr. Hardy's information with something akin to consternation, the idea of the autocrat of Equator Lodge as a stowaway on board the ship of his ancient enemy proving too serious for ordinary comment. Mrs. Kingdom's usual expressions of surprise, "Well, I never did!" and "Good gracious alive!" died on her lips, and she sat gazing helpless and round-eyed at her niece.

"I wonder what he said," she gasped, at last.

Miss Nugent, who was trying to imagine her father in his new *role* aboard the *Conqueror*, paid no heed. It was not a pleasant idea, and her eyes flashed with temper as she thought of it. Sooner or later the whole affair would be public property.

"I had an idea all along that he wasn't in London," murmured Mrs. Kingdom. "Fancy that Nathan Smith standing in Sam's room telling us falsehoods like that! He never even blushed."

"But you said that you kept picturing father walking about the streets of London, wrestling with his pride and trying to make up his mind to come home again," said her niece, maliciously.

Mrs. Kingdom fidgeted, but before she could think of a satisfactory reply Bella came to the door and asked to speak to her for a moment. Profiting by her absence, Mr. Hardy leaned towards Miss Nugent, and in a low voice expressed his sorrow at the mishap to her father, and his firm conviction

that everything that could be thought of for that unfortunate mariner's comfort would be done.

"Our fathers will probably come back good friends," he concluded. "There is nothing would give me more pleasure than that, and I think that we had better begin and set them a good example."

"It is no good setting an example to people who are hundreds of miles away," said the matter-of-fact Miss Nugent. "Besides, if they have made friends, they don't want an example set them."

"But in that case they have set us an example which we ought to follow," urged Hardy.

Miss Nugent raised her eyes to his.

"Why do you wish to be on friendly terms?" she asked, with disconcerting composure.

"I should like to know your father," returned Hardy, with perfect gravity; "and Mrs. Kingdom—and you."

He eyed her steadily as he spoke, and Miss Nugent, despite her utmost efforts, realised with some indignation that a faint tinge of colour was creeping into her cheeks. She remembered his covert challenge at their last interview at Mr. Wilks's, and the necessity of reading this persistent young man a stern lesson came to her with all the force of a public duty.

"Why?" she inquired, softly, as she lowered her eyes and assumed a pensive expression.

"I admire him, for one thing, as a fine seaman," said Hardy.

"Yes," said Miss Nugent, "and——"

"And I've always had a great liking for Mrs. Kingdom," he continued; "she was very good-natured to me when I was a very small boy, I remember. She is very kind and amiable."

The baffled Miss Nugent stole a glance at him.

"And——" she said again, very softly.

"And very motherly," said Hardy, without moving a muscle.

Miss Nugent pondered, and stole another glance at him. The expression of his face was ingenuous, not to say simple. She resolved to risk it. So far he had always won in their brief encounters, and monotony was always distasteful to her, especially monotony of that kind.

"And what about me?" she said, with a friendly smile.

"You," said Hardy, with a gravity of voice belied by the amusement in his eye; "you are the daughter of the fine

seaman and the niece of the good-natured and motherly Mrs. Kingdom."

Miss Nugent looked down again hastily, and all the shrew within her clamoured for vengeance. It was the same masterful Jem Hardy that had forced his way into their seat at church as a boy. If he went on in this way he would become unbearable; she resolved, at the cost of much personal inconvenience, to give him a much-needed fall. But she realised quite clearly that it would be a matter of time.

"Of course, you and Jack are already good friends?" she said, softly.

"Very," assented Hardy. "Such good friends that I have been devoting a lot of time lately to considering ways and means of getting him out of the snares of the Kybirds."

"I should have thought that that was his affair," said Miss Nugent, haughtily.

"Mine, too," said Hardy. "I don't want him to marry Miss Kybird."

For the first time since the engagement Miss Nugent almost approved of it.

"Why not let him know your wishes?" she said, gently. "Surely that would be sufficient."

"But you don't want them to marry?" said Hardy, ignoring the remark.

"I don't want my brother to do anything shabby," replied the girl; "but I shouldn't be sorry, of course, if they did not."

"Very good," said Hardy. "Armed with your consent I shall leave no stone unturned. Nugent was let in for this, and I am going to get him out if I can. All's fair in love and war. You don't mind *my* doing anything shabby?"

"Not in the least," replied Miss Nugent, promptly.

The reappearance of Mrs. Kingdom at this moment saved Mr. Hardy the necessity of a reply. Conversation reverted to the missing captain, and Hardy and Mrs. Kingdom together drew such a picture of the two captains fraternising that Miss Nugent felt that the millennium itself could have no surprises for her.

"He has improved very much," said Mrs. Kingdom, after the door had closed behind their visitor; "so thoughtful."

"He's thoughtful enough," agreed her niece.

"He is what I call extremely considerate," pursued the

elder lady, "but I'm afraid he is weak; anybody could turn him round their little finger."

"I believe they could," said Miss Nugent, gazing at her with admiration, "especially if he wanted to be turned."

The ice thus broken, Mr. Hardy spent the following day or two in devising plausible reasons for another visit. He found one in the person of Mr. Wilks, who, having been unsuccessful in finding his beloved master at a small tavern down by the London docks, had returned to Sunwich, by no means benefited by his change of air, to learn the terrible truth as to his disappearance from Hardy.

"I wish they'd Shanghaid me instead," he said to that sympathetic listener, "or Mrs. Silk."

"Mrs. Silk?" said the other, staring.

"Wot'll be the end of it I don't know," said Mr. Wilks, laying a hand, which still trembled, on the other's knee. "It's got about that she saved my life by 'er careful nussing, and the way she shakes 'er 'ead at me for risking my valuable life, as she calls it, going up to London, gives me the shivers."

"Nonsense," said Hardy; "she can't marry you against your will. Just be distantly civil to her."

"'Ow can you be distantly civil when she lives just opposite?" inquired the steward, querulously. "She sent Teddy over at ten o'clock last night to rub my chest with a bottle o' liniment, and it's no good me saying I'm all right when she's been spending eighteen pence o' good money over the stuff."

"She can't marry you unless you ask her," said the comforter.

Mr. Wilks shook his head.

"People in the alley are beginning to talk," he said, dolefully. "Just as I came in this afternoon old George Lee screwed up one eye at two or three women wot was gossiping near, and when I asked 'im wot 'e'd got to wink about he said that a bit o' wedding-cake 'ad blowed in his eye as I passed. It sent them silly creeturs into fits a'most."

"They'll soon get tired of it," said Hardy.

Mr. Wilks, still gloomy, ventured to doubt it, but cheered up and became almost bright when his visitor announced his intention of trying to smooth over matters for him at Equator Lodge. He became quite voluble in his defence, and attached much importance to the fact that he had nursed Miss Nugent

when she was in long clothes, and had taught her to whistle like an angel at the age of five.

"I've felt being cut adrift by her more than anything," he said, brokenly. "Nine-an'-twenty years I sailed with the cap'n and served 'im faithful, and this is my reward."

Hardy pleaded his case next day. Miss Nugent was alone when he called, and, moved by the vivid picture he drew of the old man's loneliness, accorded her full forgiveness, and decided to pay him a visit at once. The fact that Hardy had not been in the house five minutes she appeared to have overlooked.

"I'll go upstairs and put my hat and jacket on and go now," she said, brightly.

"That's very kind of you," said Hardy. His voice expressed admiring gratitude; but he made no sign of leaving his seat.

"You don't mind?" said Miss Nugent, pausing in front of him and slightly extending her hand.

"Not in the least," was the reply; "but I want to see Wilks myself. Perhaps you'll let me walk down with you?"

The request was so unexpected that the girl had no refusal ready. She hesitated and was lost. Finally, she expressed a fear that she might keep him waiting too long while she got ready — a fear which he politely declined to consider.

"Well, we'll see," said the marvelling Miss Nugent to herself as she went slowly upstairs. "He's got impudence enough for forty."

She commenced her preparations for seeing Mr. Wilks by wrapping a shawl round her shoulders and reclining in an easy-chair with a novel. It was a good story, but the room was very cold, and even the pleasure of snubbing an intrusive young man did not make amends for the lack of warmth. She read and shivered for an hour, and then with chilled fingers lit the gas and proceeded to array herself for the journey.

Her temper was not improved by seeing Mr. Hardy sitting in the dark over a good fire when she got downstairs.

"I'm afraid I've kept you waiting," she said, crisply.

"Not at all," said Hardy. "I've been very comfortable."

Miss Nugent repressed a shiver, and, crossing to the fire, thoughtlessly extended her fingers over the blaze.

"I'm afraid you're cold," said Hardy.

The girl looked round sharply. His face, or as much of it as she could see in the firelight, bore a look of honest concern somewhat at variance with the quality of his voice. If it had not been for the absurdity of altering her plans on his account she would have postponed her visit to the steward until another day.

The walk to Fullalove Alley was all too short for Jem Hardy. Miss Nugent stepped along with the air of a martyr anxious to get to the stake and have it over, and she answered in monosyllables when her companion pointed out the beauties of the night. A bitter east wind blew up the road and set her yearning for the joys of Mr. Wilks's best room.

"It's very cold," she said, shivering.

Hardy assented, and reluctantly quickened his pace to keep step with hers. Miss Nugent, with her chin sunk in a fur boa, looked neither to the right nor the left, and turning briskly into the alley, turned the handle of Mr. Wilks's door and walked in, leaving her companion to follow.

The steward, who was smoking a long pipe over the fire, looked round in alarm. Then his expression changed as he recognised his visitors, and he rose and stammered out a welcome. Two minutes later Miss Nugent, enthroned in the best chair with her toes on the fender, gave her faithful subject a free pardon and full permission to make hot coffee.

"And don't you ever try and deceive me again, Sam," she said, as she sipped the comforting beverage.

"No, Miss," said the steward, humbly. "I've 'ad a lesson. I'll never try and Shanghai anybody else agin as long as I live."

After this virtuous sentiment he sat and smoked placidly, with occasional curious glances divided between his two visitors. An idle and ridiculous idea, which occurred to him in connection with them, was dismissed at once as too preposterous for a sensible steward to entertain.

"Mrs. Kingdom well?" he inquired.

"Quite well," said the girl. "If you take me home, Sam, you shall see her, and be forgiven by her, too."

"Thankee, Miss," said the gratified steward.

"And what about your foot, Wilks?" said Hardy, somewhat taken aback by this arrangement.

"Foot, sir?" said the unconscious Mr. Wilks; "wot foot?"

"Why, the bad one," said Hardy, with a significant glance.

"Ho, that one?" said Mr. Wilks, beating time and waiting further revelations.

"Do you think you ought to use it much?" inquired Hardy.

Mr. Wilks looked at it, or, to be more exact, looked at both of them, and smiled weakly. His previous idea recurred to him with renewed force now, and several things in the young man's behaviour, hitherto disregarded, became suddenly charged with significance. Miss Nugent looked on with an air of cynical interest.

"Better not run any risk," said Hardy, gravely. "I shall be very pleased to see Miss Nugent home, if she will allow me."

"What is the matter with it?" inquired Miss Nugent, looking him full in the face.

Hardy hesitated. Diplomacy, he told himself, was one thing; lying another. He passed the question on to the rather badly used Mr. Wilks.

"Matter with it?" repeated that gentleman, glaring at him reproachfully. "It's got shootin' pains right up it. I suppose it was walking miles and miles every day in London, looking for the cap'n, was too much for it."

"Is it too bad for you to take me home, Sam?" inquired Miss Nugent, softly.

The perturbed Mr. Wilks looked from one to the other. As a sportsman his sympathies were with Hardy, but his duty lay with the girl.

"I'll do my best, Miss," he said; and got up and limped, very well indeed for a first attempt, round the room.

Then Miss Nugent did a thing which was a puzzle to herself for some time afterwards. Having won the victory she deliberately threw away the fruits of it, and, declining to allow the steward to run any risks, accepted Hardy's escort home. Mr. Wilks watched them from the door, and with his head in a whirl caused by the night's proceedings, mixed himself a stiff glass of grog to set it right, and drank to the health of both of them.

The wind had abated somewhat in violence as they walked home, and, moreover, they had their backs to it. The walk was slower and more enjoyable in many respects than the walk out. In an unusually soft mood she replied to his remarks and stole little critical glances up at him. When

A POPULAR HERO.

p. 119.

they reached the house she stood a little while at the gate gazing at the starry sky and listening to the crash of the sea on the beach.

"It is a fine night," she said, as she shook hands.

"The best I have ever known," said Hardy. "Good-bye."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE weeks passed all too quickly for Jem Hardy. He saw Kate Nugent at her own home; met her, thanks to the able and hearty assistance of Mr. Wilks, at Fullalove Alley, and on several occasions had the agreeable task of escorting her back home.

He cabled to his father for news of the illustrious stowaway immediately the *Conqueror* was notified as having reached Port Elizabeth. The reply — "Left ship" — confirmed his worst fears, but he cheerfully accepted Mrs. Kingdom's view that the captain, in order to relieve the natural anxiety of his family, had secured a passage on the first vessel homeward bound.

Captain Hardy was the first to reach home. In the early hours of a fine April morning the *Conqueror* steamed slowly into Sunwich Harbour, and in a very short time the town was revelling in a description of Captain Nugent's first voyage before the mast from lips which were never tired of repeating it. Down by the waterside Mr. Nathan Smith found that he had suddenly attained the rank of a popular hero, and his modesty took alarm at the publicity afforded to his action. It was extremely distasteful to a man who ran a quiet business on old-fashioned lines and disbelieved in advertisement. He lost three lodgers the same day.

Jem Hardy was one of the few people in Sunwich for whom the joke had no charms, and he betrayed such an utter lack of sympathy with his father's recital that the latter accused him at last of wanting a sense of humour.

"I don't see anything amusing in it," said his son, stiffly.

Captain Hardy recapitulated one or two choice points, and was even at some pains to explain them.

"I can't see any fun in it," repeated his son. "Your behaviour seems to me to have been deplorable."

"What?" shouted the captain, hardly able to believe his ears.

"Captain Nugent was your guest," pursued the other; "he got on your ship by accident, and he should have been treated decently as a saloon passenger."

"And been apologised to for coming on board, I suppose?" suggested the captain.

"It wouldn't have been amiss," was the reply.

The captain leaned back in his chair and regarded him thoughtfully.

"I can't think what's the matter with you, Jem," he said.

"Ordinary decent ideas, that's all," said his son, scathingly.

"There's something more in it than that," said the other, positively. "I don't like to see this love-your-enemy business with you, Jem; it ain't natural to you. Has your health been all right while I've been away?"

"Of course it has," said his son, curtly. "If you didn't want Captain Nugent aboard with you why didn't you put him ashore? It wouldn't have delayed you long. Think of the worry and anxiety you've caused poor Mrs. Kingdom."

"A holiday for her," growled the captain.

"It has affected her health," continued his son; "and besides, think of his daughter. She's a high-spirited girl, and all Sunwich is laughing over her father's mishap."

"Nugent fell into his own trap," exclaimed the captain, impatiently. "And it won't do that girl of his any harm to be taken down a peg or two. Do her good. Knock some of the nonsense out of her."

"That's not the way to speak of a lady," said Jem, hotly.

The offended captain regarded him somewhat sourly; then his face changed, and he got up from his chair and stood before his son with consternation depicted on every feature.

"You don't mean to tell me," he said, slowly; "you don't mean to tell me that you're thinking anything of Kate Nugent?"

"Why not?" demanded the other, defiantly; "why shouldn't I?"

Captain Hardy, whistling softly, made no reply, but still stood eyeing him.

"I thought there was some other reason for your consideration besides 'ordinary decent ideas,'" he said, at last. "When did it come on? How long have you had it?"

Mr. Hardy, jun., in a studiously unfilial speech, intimated that these pleasantries were not to his taste.

"No, of course not," said the captain, resuming his seat. "Well, I'm sorry if it's serious, Jem, but I never dreamt you had any ideas in that quarter. If I had I'd have given old Nugent the best bunk on the ship and sung him to sleep myself. Has she given you any encouragement?"

"Don't know," said Jem, who found the conversation awkward.

"Extraordinary thing," said the captain, shaking his head, "extraordinary! Like a play."

"Play?" said his son, sharply.

"Play," repeated his father, firmly. "What is the name of it? I saw it once at Newcastle. The lovers take poison and die across each other's chests because their people won't let 'em marry. And that reminds me. I saw some phosphor-paste in the kitchen, Jem. Whose is it?"

"I'm glad to be the means of affording you amusement," said Jem, grinding his teeth.

Captain Hardy regarded him affectionately.

"Go easy, my lad," he said, equably; "go easy. If I'd known it before, things would have been different; as I didn't, we must make the best of it. She's a pretty girl, and a good one, too, for all her airs, but I'm afraid she's too fond of her father to overlook this."

"That's where you've made such a mess of things," broke in his son. "Why on earth you two old men couldn't——"

"Easy," said the startled captain. "When you are in the early fifties, my lad, your ideas about age will be more accurate. Besides, Nugent is seven or eight years older than I am."

"What became of him?" inquired Jem.

"He was off the moment we berthed," said his father, suppressing a smile. "I don't mean that he bolted—he'd got enough starch left in him not to do that—but he didn't trespass on our hospitality a moment longer than was necessary. I heard that he got a passage home on the *Columbus*. He knew the master. She sailed some time

before us for London. I thought he'd have been home by this."

It was not until two days later, however, that the gossip in Sunwich received a pleasant fillip by the arrival of the injured captain. He came down from London by the mid-day train, and, disdaining the privacy of a cab, prepared to run the gauntlet of his fellow-townsmen.

A weaker man would have made a *détour*, but he held a direct course, and with a curt nod to acquaintances who would have stopped him, walked swiftly in the direction of home. Tradesmen ran to their shop-doors to see him, and smoking amphibians lounging at street corners broke out into sunny smiles as he passed. He met these annoyances with a set face and a cold eye, but his views concerning children were not improved by the crowd of small creatures which fluttered along the road ahead of him and, hopeful of developments, clustered round the gate as he passed in.

It is the pride and privilege of most returned wanderers to hold forth at great length concerning their adventures, but Captain Nugent was commendably brief. At first he could hardly be induced to speak of them at all, but the necessity of contradicting stories which Bella had gleaned for Mrs. Kingdom from friends in town proved too strong for him. He ground his teeth with suppressed fury as he listened to some of them. The truth was bad enough, and his daughter, sitting by his side with her hand in his, was trembling with indignation.

"Poor father," she said, tenderly; "what a time you must have had."

"It won't bear thinking of," said Mrs. Kingdom, not to be outdone in sympathy.

"Well, don't think of it," said the captain, shortly.

Mrs. Kingdom sighed as though to indicate that her feelings were not to be suppressed in that simple fashion.

"The anxiety has been very great," she said, shaking her head, "but everybody's been very kind. I'm sure all our friends have been most sympathetic. I couldn't go outside the house without somebody stopping me and asking whether there was any news of you. I'd no idea you were so popular; even the milkman——"

"I'd like some tea," interrupted the captain, roughly; "that is, when you have finished your very interesting information."

Mrs. Kingdom pursed her lips together to suppress the words she was afraid to utter, and rang the bell.

"Your master would like some tea," she said, primly, as Bella appeared. "He has had a long journey."

The captain started and eyed her fiercely; Mrs. Kingdom, her good temper quite restored by this little retort, folded her hands in her lap and gazed at him with renewed sympathy.

"We all missed you very much," said Kate, softly. "But we had no fears once we knew that you were at sea."

"And I suppose some of the sailors were kind to you?" suggested the unfortunate Mrs. Kingdom. "They are rough fellows, but I suppose some of them have got their hearts in the right place. I dare say they were sorry to see you in such a position."

The captain's reply was of a nature known to Mrs. Kingdom and her circle as "snapping one's head off." He drew his chair to the table as Bella brought in the tray and, accepting a cup of tea, began to discuss with his daughter the events which had transpired in his absence.

"There is no news," interposed Mrs. Kingdom, during an interval. "Mr. Hall's aunt died the other day."

"Never heard of her," said the captain.

"Neither had I, till then," said his sister. "What a lot of people there are one never hears of, John."

The captain stared at her offensively and went on with his meal. A long silence ensued.

"I suppose you didn't get to hear of the cable that was sent?" said Mrs. Kingdom, making another effort to arouse interest.

"What cable?" inquired her brother.

"The one Mr. Hardy sent to his father about you," replied Mrs. Kingdom.

The captain pushed his chair back and stared her full in the face.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

His sister explained.

"Do you mean to tell me that you've been speaking to young Hardy?" exclaimed the captain.

"I could hardly help doing so, when he came here," returned his sister, with dignity. "He has been very anxious about you."

Captain Nugent rose and strode up and down the room. Then he stopped and glanced sharply at his daughter.

"Were you here when he called?" he demanded.

"Yes," was the reply.

"And you—you spoke to him?" roared the captain.

"I had to be civil," said Miss Nugent, calmly; "I'm not a sea-captain."

Her father walked up and down the room again. Mrs. Kingdom, terrified at the storm she had evoked, gazed helplessly at her niece.

"What did he come here for?" said the captain.

Miss Nugent glanced down at her plate.

"I can't imagine," she said, demurely. "The first time he came to tell us what had become of you."

The captain stopped in his walk and eyed her sternly.

"I am very fortunate in my children," he said, slowly. "One is engaged to marry the daughter of the shadiest rascal in Sunwich, and the other——"

"And the other?" said his daughter, proudly, as he paused.

"The other," said the captain, as he came round the table and put his hand on her shoulder, "is my dear and obedient daughter."

"Yes," said Miss Nugent; "but that isn't what you were going to say. You need not worry about me; I shall not do anything that would displease you."

CHAPTER XVIII.

With a view to avoiding the awkwardness of a chance meeting with any member of the Nugent family Hardy took the sea road on his way to the office the morning after the captain's return. Common sense told him to leave matters for the present to the healing hand of Time, and to cultivate habits of self-effacement by no means agreeable to one of his temperament.

Despite himself his spirits rose as he walked. It was an ideal spring morning, cool and sunny. The short turf by the side of the road was fragrant under his heel, and a light wind stirred the blueness of the sea. On the beach below two grizzled men of restful habit were endeavouring to make an old boat waterproof with red and green paint.

A long figure approaching slowly from the opposite direction broke into a pleasant smile as he drew near and quickened his pace to meet him.

"You're out early," said Hardy, as the old man stopped and turned with him.

"'Ave to be, sir," said Mr. Wilks, darkly; "out early and 'ome late, and more often than not getting my dinner out. That's my life nowadays."

"Can't you let her see that her attentions are undesirable?" inquired Hardy, gravely.

"I can't be rude to a woman," said the steward, with a melancholy smile; "if I could, my life would ha' been very different. She's always stepping across to ask my advice about Teddy, or something o' that sort. All last week she kept borrowing my frying-pan, so at last by way of letting 'er see I didn't like it I went out and bought 'er one for herself. Wot's the result? Instead o' being offended she went out and bought me a couple o' neck-ties. When I didn't wear 'em she pretended it was because I didn't like the colour, and she went and bought two more. I'm wearing one now."

He shook his head ruefully, and Hardy glanced at a tie which would have paled the glories of a rainbow. For some time they walked along in silence.

"I'm going to pay my respects to Cap'n Nugent this afternoon," said Mr. Wilks, suddenly.

"Ah," said the other.

"I knew what it 'ud be with them two on the same ship," continued Mr. Wilks. "I didn't say nothing when you was talking to Miss Kate, but I knew well enough."

"Ah," said Hardy again. There was no mistaking the significance of the steward's remarks, and he found them somewhat galling. It was all very well to make use of his humble friend, but he had no desire to discuss his matrimonial projects with him.

"It's a great pity," pursued the unconscious Mr. Wilks, "just as everything seemed to be going on smoothly; but while there's life there's 'ope."

"That's a smart barge over there," said Hardy, pointing it out.

Mr. Wilks nodded.

"I shall keep my eyes open this afternoon," he said reassuringly. "And if I get a chance of putting in a word it'll be put in. Twenty-nine years I sailed with the cap'n, and if there's anybody knows his weak spots it's me."

He stopped as they reached the town and said "good-bye." He pressed the young man's hand sympathetically, and a wink of intense artfulness gave point to his last remark.

"There's always Sam Wilks's cottage," he said, in a husky whisper; "and if two of 'is friends *should* 'appen to meet there, who'd be the wiser?"

He gazed benevolently after the young man's retreating figure and continued his stroll, his own troubles partly forgotten in the desire to assist his friends. It would be a notable feat for the humble steward to be the means of bringing the young people together and thereby bringing to an end the feud of a dozen years. He pictured himself eventually as the trusted friend and adviser of both families, and in one daring flight of fancy saw himself hobnobbing with the two captains over pipes and whisky.

Neatly dressed, and carrying a small offering of wall-flowers, he set out that afternoon to call on his old master, giving, as he walked, the last touches to a little speech of welcome which he had prepared during dinner. It was a happy effort, albeit a trifle laboured, but Captain Nugent's speech—the inspiration of the moment—gave it no chance.

He started the moment the bowing Mr. Wilks entered the

room, his voice rising gradually from low, bitter tones to a hurricane note which Bella could hear in the kitchen without even leaving her chair. Mr. Wilks stood dazed and speechless before him, holding the wallflowers in one hand and his cap in the other. In this attitude he listened to a description of his character drawn with the loving skill of an artist whose whole heart was in his work, and who seemed never tired of filling in details.

"If you ever have the hardihood to come to my house again," he concluded, "I'll break every bone in your misshapen body. Get!"

Mr. Wilks turned and groped his way to the door. Then he went a little way back with some idea of defending himself, but the door of the room was slammed in his face. He walked slowly down the path to the road and stood there for some time in helpless bewilderment. In all his sixty years of life his feelings had never been so outraged. His cap was still in his hand, and, with a helpless gesture, he put it on and scattered his floral offering in the road. Then he made a bee-line for the "Two Schooners."

Though convivial by nature and ever free with his money, he sat drinking alone in silent misery. Men came and went, but he still sat there noting with mournful pride the attention caused by his unusual bearing. To casual inquiries he shook his head; to more direct ones he only sighed heavily and applied himself to his liquor. Curiosity increased with numbers as the day wore on, and the steward, determined to be miserable, fought manfully against an ever-increasing cheerfulness due to the warming properties of the ale within.

"I 'ope you ain't lost nobody, Sam?" said a discomfited inquirer at last.

Mr. Wilks shook his head.

"You look as though you'd lost a shilling and found a ha'penny," pursued the other.

"Found a what?" inquired Mr. Wilks, wrinkling his forehead.

"A ha'penny," said his friend.

"Who did?" said Mr. Wilks.

The other attempted to explain and was ably assisted by two friends, but without avail; the impression left on Mr. Wilks's mind being that somebody had got a shilling of his. He waxed exceeding bitter, and said that he had been missing shillings for a long time.

"You're labourin' under a mistake, Sam," said the first speaker.

Mr. Wilks laughed scornfully and essayed a sneer, while his friends, regarding his contortions with some anxiety, expressed a fear that he was not quite himself. To this suggestion the steward deigned no reply, and turning to the landlord bade him replenish his mug.

"You've 'ad enough, Mr. Wilks," said that gentleman, who had been watching him for some time.

Mr. Wilks, gazing at him mistily, did not at first understand the full purport of this remark; but when he did, his wrath was so majestic and his remarks about the quality of the brew so libellous that the landlord lost all patience.

"You get off home," he said, sharply.

"Listen t' me," said Mr. Wilks, impressively.

"I don't want no words with you," said the landlord. "You get off home while you can."

"That's right, Sam," said one of the company, putting his hand on the steward's arm. "You take his advice."

Mr. Wilks shook the hand off and eyed his adviser ferociously. Then he took a glass from the counter and smashed it on the floor. The next moment the bar was in a ferment, and the landlord, gripping Mr. Wilks round the middle, skilfully piloted him to the door and thrust him into the road.

The strong air blowing from the sea disordered the steward's faculties still further. His treatment inside was forgotten, and, leaning against the front of the tavern, he stood open-mouthed, gazing at marvels. Ships in the harbour suddenly quitted their native element and were drawn up into the firmament; nobody passed but twins.

"Evening, Mr. Wilks," said a voice.

The steward peered down at the voice. At first he thought it was another case of twins, but looking closer he saw that it was Mr. Edward Silk, alone. He saluted him graciously, and then, with a wave of his hand towards the sky, sought to attract his attention to the ships there.

"Yes," said the unconscious Mr. Silk, "sign of a fine day to-morrow. Are you going my way?"

Mr. Wilks smiled, and detaching himself from the tavern with some difficulty just saved Mr. Silk from a terrible fall by clutching him forcibly round the neck. The ingratitude of Mr. Silk was a rebuff to a nature which was at that moment over-

flowing with goodwill. For a moment the steward was half inclined to let him go home alone, but the reflection that he would never get there softened him.

"Pull yourself t'gether," he said, gravely. "Now, 'old on me."

The road, as they walked, rose up in imitation of the shipping, but Mr. Wilks knew now the explanation: Teddy Silk was intoxicated. Very gently he leaned towards the erring youth and wagged his head at him.

"Are you going to hold up or aren't you?" demanded Mr. Silk, shortly.

The steward waived the question; he knew from experience the futility of arguing with men in drink. The great thing was to get Teddy Silk home, not to argue with him. He smiled good-temperedly to himself, and with a sudden movement pinned him up against the wall in time to arrest another fall.

With frequent halts by the way, during which the shortness of Mr. Silk's temper furnished Mr. Wilks with the texts of several sermons, none of which he finished, they at last reached Fullalove Alley, and the steward, with a brief exhortation to his charge to hold his head up, bore down on Mrs. Silk, who was sitting in her doorway.

"I've brought 'im 'ome," he said, steadying himself against the door-post; "brought 'im 'ome."

"Brought 'im 'ome?" said the bewildered Mrs. Silk.

"Don' say anything to 'im," entreated Mr. Wilks, "my sake. Thing might 'appen anybody."

"He's been like that all the way," said Mr. Silk, regarding the steward with much disfavour. "I don't know why I troubled about him, I'm sure."

"Crowd roun' 'im," pursued the imaginative Mr. Wilks. "'Old up, Teddy."

"I'm sure it's very kind of you, Mr. Wilks," said the widow, as she glanced at a little knot of neighbours standing near. "Will you come inside for a minute or two?"

She moved the chair to let him pass, and Mr. Wilks, still keeping the restraining hand of age on the shoulder of intemperate youth, passed in and stood, smiling amiably, while Mrs. Silk lit the lamp and placed it in the centre of the table, which was laid for supper. The light shone on a knuckle of boiled pork, a home-made loaf, and a fresh-cut wedge of cheese.

"I suppose you won't stay and pick a bit o' supper with us?" said Mrs. Silk.

"Why not?" inquired Mr. Wilks.

"I'm sure, if I had known," said Mrs. Silk, as she piloted him to a seat, "I'd 'ave 'ad something nice. There, now! If I 'aven't been and forgot the beer."

She left the table and went into the kitchen, and Mr. Wilks's eyes glistened as she returned with a large brown jug full of foaming ale and filled his glass.

"Teddy mustn't 'ave any," he said, sharply, as she prepared to fill that gentleman's glass.

"Just 'arf a glass," she said, winsomely.

"Not a drop," said Mr. Wilks, firmly.

Mrs. Silk hesitated, and screwing up her forehead, glanced significantly at her son.

"'Ave some by and bye," she whispered.

"Give me the jug," said Mr. Silk, indignantly. "What are you listening to 'im for? Can't you see what's the matter with 'im?"

"Not to 'ave it," said Mr. Wilks; "put it 'ere.

He thumped the table emphatically with his fist, and before her indignant son could interfere Mrs. Silk had obeyed. It was the last straw. Mr. Edward Silk rose to his feet with tremendous effect, and, first thrusting his plate violently away from him, went out into the night, slamming the door behind him with such violence that the startled Mr. Wilks was nearly blown out of his chair.

"He don't mean nothing," said Mrs. Silk, turning a rather scared face to the steward. "'E's a bit jealous of you, I s'pose."

Mr. Wilks shook his head. Truth to tell, he was rather at a loss to know exactly what had happened.

"And then there's 'is love affair," sighed Mrs. Silk. "He'll never get over the loss of Amelia Kybird. I always know when 'e 'as seen her, he's that miserable there's no getting a word out of 'im."

Mr. Wilks smiled vaguely and went on with his supper, and, the meal finished, allowed himself to be installed in an easy-chair, while his hostess cleared the table. He sat and smoked in high good humour with himself; the occasional remarks he made being received with an enthusiasm which they seldom provoked elsewhere.

"I should like t' sit 'ere all night," he said, at last.

"I don't believe it," said Mrs. Silk, playfully.

"Like t' sit 'ere all night," repeated Mr. Wilks, somewhat sternly. "All nex' day, all day after, day after that, day——"

Mrs. Silk eyed him softly.

"Why would you like to sit here all that time?" she inquired, in a low voice.

"B'cause," said Mr. Wilks, simply, "b'cause I don't feel's if I can stand. Goo'-night."

He closed his eyes on the indignant Mrs. Silk and fell fast asleep. It was a sound sleep and dreamless, and only troubled by the occasional ineffectual attempts of his hostess to arouse him. She gave up the attempt at last, and, taking up a pair of socks, sat working thoughtfully the other side of the fireplace.

The steward awoke an hour or two later, and after what seemed a terrible struggle, found himself standing at the open door with the cold night air blowing in his face, and a voice which, by an effort of memory, he identified as that of Edward Silk, inviting him "to go home and lose no time about it." Then the door slammed behind him, and he stood balancing himself with some difficulty on the step, wondering what had happened. By the time he had walked up and down the deserted alley three or four times light was vouchsafed to him, and, shivering slightly, he found his own door and went to bed.

CHAPTER XIX.

ANY hopes which Hardy might have entertained as to the attitude of Miss Nugent were dispelled the first time he saw her, that dutiful daughter of a strong-willed sire favouring him with a bow which was exactly half an inch in depth and then promptly bestowing her gaze elsewhere. He passed Captain Nugent next day, and for a week afterwards he had only to close his eyes to see in all its appalling virulence the glare with which that gentleman had acknowledged his attempt at recognition.

He fared no better in Fullalove Alley, a visit to Mr. Wilks eliciting the fact that that delectable thoroughfare had been put out of bounds for Miss Nugent. Moreover, Mr. Wilks was full of his own troubles and anxious for any comfort and advice that could be given to him. All the alley knew that Mrs. Silk had quarrelled with her son over the steward, and, without knowing the facts, spoke their mind with painful freedom concerning them.

"She and Teddy don't speak to each other now," said Mr. Wilks, gloomily, "and to 'ear people talk you'd think it was my fault."

Hardy gave him what comfort he could. He even went the length of saying that Mrs. Silk was a fine woman.

"She acts like a suffering martyr," exclaimed Mr. Wilks. "She comes over 'ere dropping hints that people are talking about us, and that they ask 'er awkward questions. Pretending to misunderstand 'er every time is enough to send me crazy; and she's so sudden in what she says there's no being up to 'er. On'y this morning she asked me if I should be sorry if she died."

"What did you say?" inquired his listener.

"I said 'yes,'" admitted Mr. Wilks, reluctantly. "I couldn't say anything else; but I said that she wasn't to let my feelings interfere with 'er in any way."

Captain Hardy sailed a day or two later, and after that nothing happened. Equator Lodge was an impregnable fortress, and the only member of the garrison he saw in a fortnight was Bella.

His depression did not escape the notice of his partner, who, after first advising love-philtres and then a visit to a well-known specialist for diseases of the heart, finally recom-

mended more work, and put a generous portion of his own on to the young man's desk. Hardy, who was in an evil temper, pitched it on to the floor, and, with a few incisive remarks on levity unbecoming to age, pursued his duties in gloomy silence.

A short time afterwards, however, he had to grapple with his partner's work in real earnest. For the first time in his life the genial shipbroker was laid up with a rather serious illness. A chill caught while bathing was going the round of certain unsuspected weak spots, and the patient, who was of an inquiring turn of mind, was taking a greater interest in medical works than his doctor deemed advisable.

"Most interesting study," he said, faintly, to Hardy, as the latter sat by his bedside one evening and tried to cheer him in the usual way by telling him that there was nothing the matter with him. "There are dozens of different forms of liver complaint alone, and I've got 'em all."

"Liver isn't much," said his visitor, with the confidence of youth.

"Mine is," retorted the invalid; "it's twice its proper size and still growing. Base of the left lung is solidifying, or I'm much mistaken; the heart, instead of waltzing, as is suitable to my time of life, is doing a gallop, and everything else is as wrong as it can be."

"When are you coming back?" inquired the other.

"Back?" repeated Swann. "Back? You haven't been listening. I'm a wreck. All through violating man's primeval instincts by messing about in cold water. What is the news?"

Hardy pondered and shook his head. "Nugent is going to be married in July," he said, at last.

"He'd better have had that trip on the whaler," commented Mr. Swann; "but that is not news. Nathan Smith told it me this morning."

"Nathan Smith?" repeated the other, in surprise.

"I've done him a little service," said the invalid. "Got him out of a mess with Garth & Co. He's been here two or three times, and I must confess I find him a most alluring rascal."

"Birds of a feather——" began Hardy, superciliously.

"Don't flatter me," said Swann, putting his hand out of the bed-clothes with a deprecatory gesture. "I am not worthy to sit at his feet. He is the most amusing knave on the coast. He is like a sunbeam in a sick-room when you can once get him

to talk of his experiences. Have you seen young Nugent lately? Does he seem cheerful?"

"Yes, but he is not," was the reply.

"Well, it's natural for the young to marry," said the other, gravely. "Murchison will be the next to go, I expect."

"Possibly," returned Hardy, with affected calmness.

"Blaikie was saying something about it this morning," resumed Swann, regarding him from half-closed lids, "but he was punching and tapping me all about the ribs while he was talking, and I didn't catch all he said, but I think it's all arranged. Murchison is there nearly every day, I understand; I suppose you meet him there?"

Mr. Hardy, whistling softly, rose and walked round the room, uncorking medicine bottles and sniffing at their contents. A smile of unaffected pleasure lit up his features as he removed the stopper from one particularly pungent mixture.

"Two tablespoonfuls three times a day," he read, slowly. "When did you have the last, Swann? Shall I ring for the nurse?"

The invalid shook his head impatiently.

"You're an ungrateful dog," he muttered, "or you would tell me how your affair is going. Have you got any chance?"

"You're getting light-headed now," said Hardy, calmly. "I'd better go."

"All right, go then," responded the invalid; "but if you lose that girl just for the want of a little skilled advice from an expert, you'll never forgive yourself — I'm serious."

"Well, you *must* be ill then," said the younger man, with anxiety.

"Twice," said Mr. Swann, lying on his back and apparently addressing the ceiling, "twice I have given this young man invaluable assistance, and each time he has bungled."

Hardy laughed, and, the nurse returning to the room, bade him "good-bye," and departed. After the close atmosphere of the sick-room the air was delicious, and he walked along slowly, deep in thought. From Nathan Smith his thoughts wandered to Jack Nugent and his unfortunate engagement, and from that to Kate Nugent. For months he had been revolving impossible schemes in his mind to earn her gratitude, and possibly that of

the captain, by extricating Jack. In the latter connection he was also reminded of that unhappy victim of unrequited affection, Edward Silk.

It was early to go indoors, and the house was dull. He turned and retraced his steps, and, his thoughts reverting to his sick partner, smiled as he remembered remarks which that irresponsible person had made at various times concerning the making of his last will and testament. Then he came to a sudden standstill as a wild, forlorn-hope kind of idea suddenly occurred to him. He stood for some time thinking, then walked a little way, and then stopped again as various difficulties presented themselves for solution. Finally, despite the lateness of the hour, he walked back in some excitement to the house he had quitted over half an hour before with the intention of speaking to the invalid concerning a duty peculiarly incumbent upon elderly men of means.

The nurse, who came out of the sick-room, gently closing the door after her, demurred a little to this second visit, but, receiving a promise from the visitor not to excite the invalid, left them together. The odour of the abominable physic was upon the air.

"Well?" said the invalid.

"I have been thinking that I was rather uncivil a little while ago," said Hardy.

"Ah!" said the other. "What do you want?"

"A little of that skilled assistance you were speaking of."

Mr. Swann made an alarming noise in his throat. Hardy sprang forward in alarm, but he motioned him back.

"I was only laughing," he explained.

Hardy repressed his annoyance by an effort, and endeavoured, but with scant success, to return the other's smile.

"Go on," said the shipbroker, presently.

"I have thought of a scheme for upsetting Nugent's marriage," said Hardy, slowly. "It is just a forlorn hope which depends for its success on you and Nathan Smith."

"He's a friend of Kybird's," said the other, drily.

"That is the most important thing of all," rejoined Hardy. "That is, next to your shrewdness and tact; everything depends upon you, really, and whether you can fool Smith. It is a great thing in our favour that you have been taking him up lately."

"Are you coming to the point or are you not?" demanded the shipbroker.

Hardy looked cautiously round the room, and then, drawing his chair close to the bed, leaned over the prostrate man and spoke rapidly into his ear.

"*What!*" cried the astounded Mr. Swann, suddenly sitting up in his bed. "You—you scoundrel!"

"It's to be done," said Hardy.

"You ghoul!" said the invalid, glaring at him. "Is that the way to talk to a sick man? You unscrupulous rascal!"

"It'll be amusement for you," pleaded the other, "and if we are successful it will be the best thing in the end for everybody. Think of the good you'll do."

"Where you get such rascally ideas from, I can't think," mused the invalid. "Your father is a straightforward, honest man, and your partner's uprightness is the talk of Sunwich."

"It doesn't take much to make Sunwich talk," retorted Hardy.

"A preposterous suggestion to make to a man of my standing," said the shipbroker, ignoring the remark. "If the affair ever leaked out I should never hear the end of it."

"It can't leak out," said Hardy, "and if it does there is no direct evidence. They will never really know until you die; they can only suspect."

"Very well," said the shipbroker, with a half-indulgent, half-humorous glance. "Anything to get rid of you. It's a crack-brained scheme, and could only originate with a young man whose affections have weakened his head—I consent."

"Bravo!" said Hardy, and patted him on the back. Mr. Swann referred to the base of his left lung, and he apologised.

"I'll have to fix it up with Blaikie," said the invalid, lying down again. "Murchison got two of his best patients last week, so that it ought to be easy. And, besides, he is fond of innocent amusement."

"I'm awfully obliged to you," said Hardy.

"It might be as well if we pretended to quarrel," said the invalid, reflectively, "especially as you are known to be a friend of Nugent's. We'll have a few words—before my housekeeper if possible, to ensure publicity—and then

you had better not come again. Send Silk instead with messages."

Hardy thanked him and whispered a caution as a footstep was heard on the landing. The door opened, and the nurse, followed by the housekeeper bearing a tray, entered the room.

"And I can't be worried about these things," said Swann, in an acrimonious voice, as they entered. "If you are not capable of settling a simple question like that yourself, ask the office-boy to instruct you."

"It's your work," retorted Hardy, "and a nice mess it's in."

"*H'sh!*" said the nurse, coming forward hastily. "You must leave the room, sir. I can't have you exciting my patient."

Hardy bestowed an indignant glance at the invalid.

"Get out!" said that gentleman, with extraordinary fierceness for one in his weak condition. "In future, nurse, I won't have this person admitted to my room."

"Yes, yes; certainly," said the nurse. "You must go, sir; at once, please."

"I'm going," said Hardy, almost losing his gravity at the piteous spectacle afforded by the housekeeper as she stood, still holding the tray and staring open-mouthed at the combatants. "When you're tired of skulking in bed, perhaps you'll come and do your share of the work."

Mr. Swann rose to a sitting position, and his demeanour was so alarming that the nurse, hastening over to him, entreated him to lie down, and waved Hardy peremptorily from the room.

"Puppy!" said the invalid, with great relish. "Blockhead!"

He gazed fixedly at the young man as he departed, and then, catching sight in his turn of the housekeeper's perplexity, laid himself down and buried his face in the bed-clothes. The nurse crossed over to her assistant and, taking the tray from her, told her in a sharp whisper that if she ever admitted Mr. Hardy again she would not be answerable for the consequences.

CHAPTER XX.

CHARMED at the ease with which he had demolished the objections of Mr. Adolphus Swann and won that suffering gentleman over to his plans, Hardy began to cast longing glances at Equator Lodge. He reminded himself that the labourer was worthy of his hire, and it seemed moreover an extremely desirable thing that Captain Nugent should know that he was labouring in his vineyard with the full expectation of a bounteous harvest. He resolved to call.

Kate Nugent, who heard the gate swing behind him as he entered the front garden, looked up and stood spellbound at his audacity. As a fairly courageous young person she was naturally an admirer of boldness in others, but this seemed sheer recklessness. Moreover, it was recklessness in which, if she stayed where she was, she would have to bear a part or be guilty of rudeness, of which she felt incapable. She took a third course, and, raising her eyebrows at the unnecessarily loud knocking with which the young man announced his arrival, retreated in good order into the garden, where her father, in a somewhat heated condition, was laboriously planting geraniums. She had barely reached him when Bella, in a state of fearsome glee, came down the garden to tell the captain of his visitor.

"Who?" said the latter, sharply, as he straightened his aching back.

"Young Mr. Hardy," said Bella, impressively. "I showed 'im in. I didn't ask him to take a chair, but he took one."

"Young Hardy to see me!" said the captain to his daughter, after Bella had returned to the house. "How dare he come to my house? Infernal impudence! I won't see him."

"Shall I go in and see him for you?" inquired Kate, with affected artlessness.

"You stay where you are, Miss," said her father. "I won't have him speak to you; I won't have him look at you. I'll——"

He beat his dirty hands together and strode off towards the house. Jem Hardy rose from his chair as the captain entered the room, and, ignoring a look of black inquiry, bade him 'Good afternoon."

BELLA, IN A STATE OF FEARSOME GLEE, CAME DOWN THE GARDEN TO TELL THE CAPTAIN OF HIS VISITOR.

p. 138.

"What do you want?" asked the captain, gruffly, as he stared him straight in the eye.

"I came to see you about your son's marriage," said the other. "Are you still desirous of preventing it?"

"I'm sorry you've had the trouble," said the captain, in a voice of suppressed anger; "and now may I ask you to get out of my house?"

Hardy bowed.

"I am sorry I have troubled you," he said, calmly, "but I have a plan which I think would get your son out of this affair, and, as a business man, I wanted to make something out of it."

The captain eyed him scornfully, but he was glad to see this well-looking, successful son of his old enemy tainted with such sordid views. Instead of turning him out, he spoke to him almost fairly.

"How much do you want?" he inquired.

"All things considered, I am asking a good deal," was the reply.

"How much?" repeated the captain, impatiently.

Hardy hesitated.

"In exchange for the service I want permission to visit here when I choose," he said, at length; "say twice a week."

Words failed the captain; none with which he was acquainted seemed forcible enough for the occasion. He faced his visitor stuttering with rage, and pointed to the door.

"Get out of my house," he roared.

"I'm sorry to have intruded," said Hardy, as he crossed the room and paused at the door; "it is none of my business, of course. I thought that I saw an opportunity of doing your son a good turn—he is a friend of mine—and at the same time paying off old scores against Kybird and Nathan Smith. I thought that on that account it might suit you. Good afternoon."

He walked out into the hall, and reaching the front door, fumbled clumsily with the catch. The captain, watching his efforts in grim silence, began to experience the twin promptings of curiosity and temptation.

"What is this wonderful plan of yours?" he demanded, with a sneer.

"Just at present that must remain a secret," said the other. He came from the door and, unbidden, followed the captain into the room again.

"What do you want to visit at my house for?" inquired the latter, in a forbidding voice.

"To see your daughter," said Hardy.

The captain had a relapse. He had not expected a truthful answer, and, when it came, in the most matter-of-fact tone, it found him quite unprepared. His first idea was to sacrifice his dignity and forcibly eject his visitor, but more sensible thoughts prevailed.

"You are quite sure, I suppose, that your visits would be agreeable to my daughter?" he said, contemptuously.

Hardy shook his head.

"I should come ostensibly to see you," he said, cheerfully; "to smoke a pipe with you."

"*Smoke!*" stuttered the captain, explosively; "smoke a pipe with ME?"

"Why not?" said the other. "I am offering you my services, and anything that is worth having is worth paying for. I suppose we could both smoke pipes under pleasanter conditions. What have you got against me? It isn't my fault that you and my father have quarrelled."

"I don't want anything more to say to you," said the captain, sternly. "I've shown you the door once. Am I to take forcible measures?"

Hardy shrugged his broad shoulders.

"I am sorry," he said, moving to the door again.

"So am I," said the other.

"It's a pity," said Hardy, regretfully. "It's the chance of a lifetime. I had set my heart on fooling Kybird and Smith, and now all my trouble is wasted. Nathan Smith would be all the better for a fall."

The captain hesitated. His visitor seemed to be confident, and he would have given a great deal to prevent his son's marriage and a great deal to repay some portion of his debt to the ingenious Mr. Smith. Moreover, there seemed to be an excellent opportunity of punishing the presumption of his visitor by taking him at his word.

"I don't think you'd enjoy your smoking here much," he said, curtly.

"I'll take my chance of that," said the other. "It will only be a matter of a few weeks, and then, if I am unsuccessful, my visits cease."

"And if you're successful, am I to have the pleasure of your company for the rest of my life?" demanded the captain.

"That will be for you decide," was the reply. "Is it a bargain?"

The captain looked at him and deliberated.

"All right. Mondays and Thursdays," he said, laconically.

Hardy saw through the ruse, and countered.

"Now Swann is ill I can't always get away when I wish," he said, easily. "I'll just drop in when I can. Good day."

He opened the door and, fearful lest the other should alter his mind at the last moment, walked briskly down the path to the gate. The captain stood for some time after his departure deep in thought, and then returned to the garden to be skilfully catechised by Miss Nugent.

"And when my young friend comes with his pipe you'll be in another room," he concluded, warningly.

Miss Nugent looked up and patted his cheek tenderly.

"What a talent for organisation you have," she remarked, softly. "A place for everything and everything in its place. The idea of his taking such a fancy to you!"

The captain coughed and eyed her suspiciously. He had been careful not to tell her Hardy's reasons for coming, but he had a shrewd idea that his caution was wasted.

"To-day is Thursday," said Kate, slowly; "he will be here to-morrow and Saturday. What shall I wear?"

The captain resumed his gardening operations by no means perturbed at the prophecy. Much as he disliked the young man, he gave him credit for a certain amount of decency, and his indignation was proportionately great the following evening when Bella announced Mr. Hardy. He made a genial remark about Shylock and a pound of flesh, but finding that it was only an excellent conversational opening—subject Shakespeare's plays—lapsed into silence.

It was an absurd situation, but he was host, and Hardy allowed him to see pretty plainly that he was a guest. He answered the latter's remarks with a very ill grace, and took covert stock of him as one of a species he had not encountered before. One result of his stock-taking was that he was spared any feeling of surprise when his visitor came the following evening.

"It's the thin edge of the wedge," said Miss Nugent, who came into the room after Hardy had departed; "you don't know him as well as I do."

"Eh?" said her father, sharply.

"I mean that you are not such a judge of character

as I am," said Kate; "and besides, I have made a special study of young men. The only thing that puzzles me is why you should have such an extraordinary fascination for him."

"You talk too much, Miss," said the captain, drawing the tobacco-jar towards him and slowly filling his pipe.

Miss Nugent sighed, and after striking a match for him, took a seat on the arm of his chair and placed her hand on his shoulder.

"I can quite understand him liking you," she said, slowly.

The captain grunted.

"And if he is like other sensible people," continued Miss Nugent, in a coaxing voice, "the more he sees of you the more he'll like you. I do hope he has not come to take you away from me."

The indignant captain edged her off the side of his chair; Miss Nugent, quite undisturbed, got on again and sat tapping the floor with her foot. Her arm stole round his neck, and she laid her cheek against his head and smiled wickedly.

"Nice-looking, isn't he?" she said, in a careless voice.

"I don't know anything about his looks," growled her father.

Miss Nugent gave a little exclamation of surprise.

"First thing I noticed," she said, with commendable gravity. "He's very good-looking and very determined. What are you going to give him if he gets poor Jack out of this miserable business?"

"Give him," said her father, staring.

"I met Jack yesterday," said Kate, "and I can see that he is as wretched as he can be. He wouldn't say so, of course. If Mr. Hardy is successful you ought to recognise it. I should suggest one of your new photographs in an eighteenpenny frame."

She slipped off the chair and quitted the room before her father could think of a suitable retort, and he sat smoking silently until the entrance of Mrs. Kingdom a few minutes later gave him an opportunity of working off a little accumulated gall.

While the junior partner was thus trying to obtain a footing at Equator Lodge, the gravest rumours of the senior partner's health were prevalent in the town. Nathan Smith, who had been to see him again, ostensibly to thank him for his

efforts on his behalf, was of opinion that he was breaking up, and in conversation with Mr. Kybird shook his head over the idea that there would soon be one open-handed gentleman the less in a world which was none too full of them.

"We've all got to go some day," observed Mr. Kybird, philosophically. "'Ow's that cough o' yours getting on, Nat?"

Mr. Smith met the pleasantry coldly; the ailment referred to was one of some standing, and had been a continual source of expense in the way of balsams and other remedies.

"He's worried about 'is money," he said, referring to Mr. Swann.

"Ah, we sha'n't 'ave that worry," said Mr. Kybird.

"Nobody to leave it to," continued Mr. Smith. "Seems a bit 'ard, don't it?"

"P'r'aps if 'e 'ad 'ad somebody to leave it to 'e wouldn't 'ave 'ad so much to leave," observed Mr. Kybird, sagely; "it's a rum world."

He shook his head over it and went on with the uncongenial task of marking down wares which had suffered by being exposed outside too long. Mr. Smith, who always took an interest in the welfare of his friends, made suggestions.

"I shouldn't put a ticket marked '*Look at this!*' on that coat," he said, severely. "It oughtn't to be looked at."

"It's the best out o' three all 'anging together," said Mr. Kybird, evenly.

"And look 'ere," said Mr. Smith. "Look what an out-o'-the-way place you've put this ticket. Why not put it higher up on the coat?"

"Becos the moth-hole ain't there," said Mr. Kybird.

Mr. Smith apologised, and watched his friend without further criticism.

"Gettin' ready for the wedding, I s'pose?" he said, presently.

Mr. Kybird assented, and his brow darkened as he spoke of surreptitious raids on his stores made by Mrs. Kybird and daughter.

"Their idea of a wedding," he said, bitterly, "is to dress up and make a show; my idea is a few real good old pals and plenty of licker."

"You'll 'ave to 'ave both," observed Nathan Smith, whose knowledge of the sex was pretty accurate.

Mr. Kybird nodded gloomily.

"'Melia and Jack don't seem to 'ave been 'itting it off partickler well lately," he said, slowly. "He's getting more uppish than wot 'e was when 'e come here first. But I got 'im to promise that he'd settle any money that 'e might ever get left him on 'Melia."

Mr. Smith's inscrutable eyes glistened into something as nearly approaching a twinkle as they were capable.

"That'll settle the five 'undred," he said, warmly. "Are you goin' to send Cap'n Nugent an invite for the wedding?"

"They'll 'ave to be asked, o' course," said Mr. Kybird, with an attempt at dignity, rendered necessary by a certain lightness in his friend's manner. "The old woman don't like the Nugent lot, but she'll do the proper thing."

"O' course she will," said Mr. Smith, soothingly. "Come over and 'ave a drink with me, Dan'l. It's your turn to stand."

CHAPTER XXI.

Gossip from one or two quarters, which reached Captain Nugent's ears through the medium of his sister, concerning the preparations for his son's marriage, prevented him from altering his mind with regard to the visits of Jem Hardy and showing that painstaking young man the door. Indeed, the nearness of the approaching nuptials bade fair to eclipse, for the time being, all other grievances, and when Hardy paid his third visit he made a determined but ineffectual attempt to obtain from him some information as to the methods by which he hoped to attain his ends. His failure made him suspicious, and he hinted pretty plainly that he had no guarantee that his visitor was not obtaining admittance under false pretences.

"Well, I'm not getting much out of it," returned Hardy, frankly.

"I wonder you come," said his hospitable host.

"I want you to get used to me," said the other.

The captain started and eyed him uneasily; the remark seemed fraught with hidden meaning.

"And then——?" he inquired, raising his bushy eyebrows.

"Then perhaps I can come oftener."

The captain gave him up. He sank back in his chair, and, crossing his legs, smoked, with his eyes fixed on the ceiling. It was difficult to know what to do with a young man who was apparently destitute of any feelings of shame or embarrassment. He bestowed a puzzled glance in his direction and saw that he was lolling in his chair with an appearance of the greatest ease and enjoyment. Following the direction of his eyes, he saw that he was gazing with much satisfaction at a photograph of Miss Nugent which graced the mantelpiece. With an odd sensation the captain suddenly identified it as one which usually stood on the chest of drawers in his bedroom, and he wondered darkly whether charity or mischief was responsible for its appearance there.

In any case, it disappeared before the occasion of Hardy's next visit, and the visitor sat with his eyes unoccupied, endeavouring to make conversation with a host who was, if anything, more discourteous than usual. It was uphill work, but he persevered, and in fifteen minutes had ranged unchecked from North Pole explorations to poultry farming. It was a relief to both of them when the door opened and Bella ushered in Dr. Murchison.

The captain received the new arrival with marked cordiality, and giving him a chair near his own, observed, with some interest, the curt greeting of the young men. The doctor's manner indicated polite surprise at seeing the other there, then he turned to the captain and began to talk to him.

For some time they chatted without interruption, and the captain's replies, when Hardy at last made an attempt to make the conversation general, enabled the doctor to see, without much difficulty, that the latter was an unwelcome guest. Charmed with the discovery, he followed his host's lead, and, with a languid air, replied to his rival in monosyllables. The captain watched with quiet satisfaction, and at each rebuff his opinion of Murchison improved. It was gratifying to find that the interloper had met his match.

Hardy sat patient.

"I am glad to have met you to-night," he said, after a long pause, during which the other two were discussing a former surgical experience of the captain's on one of his crew.

"Yes?" said Murchison.

"You are just the man I wanted to see."

"Yes?" said the doctor, again.

"Yes," said the other, nodding. "I've been very busy of late owing to my partner's illness, and you are attending several people I want to hear about."

"Indeed," said Murchison, with a half-turn towards him.

"How is Mrs. Paul?" inquired Hardy.

"Dead!" replied the other, briefly.

"*Dead?*" repeated Mr. Hardy. "Good heavens! I didn't know that there was much the matter with her."

"There was no hope for her from the first," said Murchison, somewhat sharply. "It was merely a question of prolonging her life a little while. She lived longer than I deemed possible. She surprised everybody by her vitality."

"Poor thing," said Hardy. "How is Joe Banks?"

"Dead," said Murchison, again, biting his lip and eyeing him furiously.

"Dear me!" said Hardy, shaking his head; "I met him not a month ago. He was on his way to see you then."

"The poor fellow had been an invalid nearly all his life," said Murchison to the captain, casually.

"Ay, I remember him," was the reply.

"I am almost afraid to ask you," continued Hardy, "but shut up all day, I hear so little. How is old Mrs. Ritherdon?"

Murchison reddened with helpless rage; Captain Nugent, gazing at the questioner with something almost approaching respect, waited breathlessly for the invariable answer.

"She died three weeks ago; I'm surprised that you have not heard of it," said the doctor, pointedly.

"Of course she was old," said Hardy, with the air of one advancing extenuating circumstances.

"Very old," replied the doctor, who knew that the other was now at the end of his obituary list. "Are there any other of my patients you are anxious to hear about?"

"No, thank you," returned Hardy, with some haste.

The doctor turned to his host again, but the charm was broken. His talk was disconnected, owing probably to the

fact that he was racking his brain for facts relative to the seamy side of shipbroking. And Hardy, without any encouragement whatever, was interrupting with puerile anecdotes concerning the late lamented Joe Banks. The captain came to the rescue.

"The ladies are in the garden," he said to the doctor; "perhaps you'd like to join them?"

He looked coldly over at Hardy as he spoke to see the effect of his words. Their eyes met, and the young man was on his feet as soon as his rival.

"Thanks," he said, coolly; "it is a trifle close indoors."

Before the dismayed captain could think of any dignified pretext to stay him he was out of the room. The doctor followed, and the perturbed captain, left alone, stared blankly at the door and thought of his daughter's words concerning the thin edge of the wedge.

He was a proud man and loth to show discomfiture, so that it was not until a quarter of an hour later that he followed his guests to the garden. The four people were in couples, the paths favouring that formation, although the doctor, to the detriment of the border, had made two or three determined attempts to march in fours. With a feeling akin to scorn the captain saw that he was walking with Mrs. Kingdom, while some distance in the rear Jem Hardy followed with Kate.

He stood at the back door for a little while watching; Hardy, upright and elate, was listening with profound attention to Miss Nugent; the doctor, sauntering along beside Mrs. Kingdom, was listening with a languid air to an account of her celebrated escape from measles some forty-three years before. As a professional man he would have died rather than have owed his life to the specific she advocated.

Kate Nugent, catching sight of her father, turned, and as he came slowly towards her, linked her arm in his. Her face was slightly flushed and her eyes sparkled.

"I was just coming in to fetch you," she observed; "it is so pleasant out here now."

"Delightful," said Hardy.

"We had to drop behind a little," said Miss Nugent, raising her voice. "Aunt and Dr. Murchison *will* talk about their complaints to each other! They have been exchanging prescriptions."

The captain grunted and eyed her keenly.

"I want you to come in and give us a little music," he said, shortly.

Kate nodded.

"What is your favourite music, Mr. Hardy?" she inquired, with a smile.

"Unfortunately, Mr. Hardy can't stay," said the captain, in a voice which there was no mistaking.

Hardy pulled out his watch.

"No; I must be off," he said, with a well-affected start. "Thank you for reminding me, Captain Nugent."

"I am glad to have been of service," said the other, looking his grimmest.

He acknowledged the young man's farewell with a short nod, and, forgetting his sudden desire for music, continued to pace up and down with his daughter.

"What have you been saying to that—that fellow?" he demanded, turning to her suddenly.

Miss Nugent reflected.

"I said it was a fine evening," she replied, at last.

'No doubt," said her father. "What else?"

"I think I asked him whether he was fond of gardening," said Miss Nugent, slowly. "Yes, I'm sure I did."

"You had no business to speak to him at all," said the fuming captain.

"I don't quite see how I could help doing so," said his daughter. "You surely don't expect me to be rude to your visitors? Besides, I feel rather sorry for him."

"Sorry?" repeated the captain, sharply. "What for?"

"Because he hasn't got a nice, kind, soft-spoken father," said Miss Nugent, squeezing his arm affectionately.

The appearance of the other couple at the head of the path interrupted the captain's reply. They stood in a little knot talking, but Miss Nugent, contrary to her usual habit, said but little. She stood holding her father's arm and gazing absently at the dim fields stretching away beyond the garden.

At the same time Mr. James Hardy, feeling, despite his bold front, somewhat badly snubbed, was sitting on the beach thinking over the situation. After a quarter of an hour in the company of Kate Nugent all else seemed sordid and prosaic; his own conduct in his attempt to save her brother from the consequences of his folly most sordid of all. He wondered, gloomily, what she would think when she heard of it.

He rose at last, and in the pale light of the new moon walked slowly along towards the town. In his present state of mind he wanted to talk about Kate Nugent, and the only person who could be depended upon for doing that was Samson Wilks. It was a never-tiring subject of the steward's, and since his discovery of the state of Hardy's feelings in that quarter the slightest allusion was sufficient to let loose a flood of reminiscences.

It was dark by the time Hardy reached the alley, and in most of the houses the lamps were lit behind drawn blinds. The steward's house, however, was in darkness, and there was no response when he tapped. He turned the handle of the door and looked in. A dim figure rose with a start from a chair.

"I hope you were not asleep," said Hardy.

"No, sir," said the steward, in a relieved voice. "I thought it was somebody else."

He placed a chair for his visitor, and, having lit the lamp, slowly lowered the blind and took a seat opposite.

"I've been sitting in the dark, to make a certain party think I was out," he said, slowly. "She keeps making a excuse about Teddy to come over and see me. Last night 'e talked about making a 'ole in the water to celebrate 'Melia Kybird's wedding, and she came over and sat in that chair and cried as if 'er 'art would break. After she'd gone Teddy comes over, fierce as a eagle, and wants to know wot I've been saying to 'is mother to make 'er cry. Between the two of 'em I 'ave a nice life of it."

"He is still faithful to Miss Kybird, then?" said Hardy, with a sudden sense of relief.

"Faithful?" said Mr. Wilks. "Faithful ain't no word for it. He's a sticker, that's wot 'e is, and it's my misfortune that 'is mother takes after 'im. I 'ave to go out afore breakfast and stay out till late at night, and even then like as not she catches me on the doorstep."

"Well, perhaps *she* will make a hole in the water," suggested Hardy.

Mr. Wilks smiled, but almost instantly became grave again.

"She's not that sort," he said, bitterly, and went into the kitchen to draw some beer.

He drank his in a manner which betokened that the occupation afforded him no enjoyment, and, full of his own troubles, was in no mood to discuss anything else. He gave a short

biography of Mrs. Silk, which would have furnished abundant material for half a dozen libel actions, and alluding to the demise of the late Mr. Silk, spoke of it as though it were the supreme act of artfulness in a somewhat adventurous career.

Hardy walked home with a mind more at ease than it had been at any time since his overtures to Mr. Swann. The only scruple that had troubled him was now removed, and in place of it he felt that he was acting the part of a guardian angel to Mr. Edward Silk.

CHAPTER XXII.

Mr. Nathan Smith, usually one of the most matter-of-fact men in the world, came out of Mr. Swann's house in a semi-dazed condition, and for some time after the front door had closed behind him stood gaping on the narrow pavement. His capacity for keeping his own counsel was proverbial in Sunwich; but on this occasion he felt a strong impulse to take the first man that passed by the arm, and relate to him incredible news.

He looked up and down the quiet little street and shook his head sadly. It was a street of staid and substantial old houses; houses which had mellowed and blackened with age, but whose quaint windows and chance-opened doors afforded glimpses of comfort attesting to the prosperity of those within. In the usual way Mr. Nathan Smith was of too philosophical a temperament to experience the pangs of envy, but to-day these things affected him, and he experienced a strange feeling of discontent with his lot in life.

"Some people 'ave all the luck," he muttered, and walked slowly down the road.

He continued his reflections as he walked through the somewhat squalid streets of his own quarter. The afternoon was wet and the houses looked dingier than usual; dirty inconvenient little places, most of them with a few cheap gimcracks making a brave show as near the window as possible. Mr. Smith observed them with newly opened eyes, and, for

perhaps the first time in his life, thought of the drawbacks and struggles of the poor.

In his own untidy little den at the back of the house he sat for some time deep in thought over the events of the afternoon. He had been permitted a peep at wealth; at wealth, too, which was changing hands, but was not coming his way. He lit his pipe, and producing a bottle of rum from a cupboard, helped himself liberally. The potent fluid softened him somewhat, and a half-formed intention to keep the news from Mr. Kybird melted away beneath its benign influence.

"After all, we've been pals for pretty near thirty years," said Mr. Smith to himself.

He took another draught.

"Thirty years is a long time," he mused.

He finished the glass.

"And if 'e don't give me something out of it, I'll do him as much 'arm as I can," he continued, and buttoning up his coat he rose and set out in the direction of the High Street.

The rain had ceased, and the sun was making faint efforts to break through watery clouds. Things seemed brighter, and Mr. Smith's heart beat in response. He was going to play the part of a benefactor to Mr. Kybird; to offer him access, at any rate, to such wealth as he had never dreamed of. He paused at the shop-window, and observing through a gap in the merchandise that Mr. Kybird was behind the counter, walked in and saluted him.

"I've got news for you," he said, slowly; "big news."

"Oh!" said Mr. Kybird, with indifference.

"Big news," repeated Mr. Smith, sinking thoughtlessly into the broken cane-chair, and slowly extricating himself. "Something that'll make your eyes start out of your 'ed."

The small black eyes in question were turned shrewdly in his direction.

"I've 'ad news of you 'afore, Nat," remarked Mr. Kybird, with simple severity.

The philanthropist was chilled; he fixed his eyes in a stony stare on the opposite wall. Mr. Kybird, who had ever a wholesome dread of falling a victim to his friend's cuteness, regarded him with some uncertainty, and reminded him of one or two pieces of information which had seriously depleted his till.

"Banns up yet for the wedding?" inquired Mr. Smith, still gazing in front of him with fathomless eyes.

"They'll be put up next week," said Mr. Kybird.

"Ah!" said his friend, with great emphasis. "Well, well!"

"Wot d'ye mean by 'Well, well'?" demanded the other, with some heat.

"I was only thinking," replied Mr. Smith, mildly. "P'r'aps it's all for the best and I'd better 'old my tongue. True love is better than money. After all it ain't my business, and I shouldn't get much out of it."

"Out of wot, Nat?" inquired Mr. Kybird, uneasily.

Mr. Smith, still gazing musingly before him, appeared not to hear the question.

"Nice after the rain, ain't it?" he said, slowly.

"It's all right," said the other, shortly.

"Everything smells so fresh and sweet," continued his nature-loving friend. "All the little dickey birds was a singing as if their little 'arts would break as I come along."

"I don't wonder at it," said the offended Mr. Kybird.

"And the banns go up next week," murmured the boarding-master to himself. "Well, well!"

"'Ave you anything to say agin it?" demanded Mr. Kybird.

"Cert'nly not," replied the other. "On'y don't blame me when it's too late, that's all."

Mr. Kybird, staring at him wrathfully, turned this dark saying over in his mind.

"Too late for wot?" he inquired.

"Ah!" said Nathan Smith, slowly. "Nice and fresh after the rain, ain't it? As I come along all the little dickey birds——"

"Damn the little dickey birds!" interrupted Mr. Kybird, with sudden violence. "If you've got anything to say, why don't you say it like a man?"

The parlour door opened suddenly before the other could reply, and revealed the face of Mrs. Kybird.

"Wot are you two a-quarrelling about?" she demanded. "Why don't you come inside and sit down for a bit?"

Mr. Smith accepted the invitation, and, following her into the room, found Miss Kybird busy stitching in the midst of a bewildering assortment of brown paper patterns and pieces of cloth. Mrs. Kybird gave him a chair, and, having overheard a portion of his conversation with her husband, made one or two casual inquiries.

"I've been spending a hour or two at Mr. Swann's," said Mr. Smith.

"And 'ow is he?" inquired his hostess, with an appearance of amiable interest.

The boarding-master shook his head.

"He's slipping 'is cable," he said slowly. "He's been making 'is will, and I was one o' the witnesses."

Something in Mr. Smith's manner as he made this simple statement made his listeners anxious to hear more. Mr. Kybird, who had just entered the room and was standing with his back to the door holding the handle, regarded him expectantly.

"It's been worrying 'im some time," pursued Mr. Smith. "He 'asn't got nobody belonging to 'im, and for a long time 'e couldn't think 'ow to leave it. Wot with 'ouse property and other things it's a matter of over ten thousand pounds."

"Good 'eavens!" said Mr. Kybird, who felt that he was expected to say something.

"Dr. Blaikie was the other witness," continued Mr. Smith, disregarding the interruption, "and Mr. Swann made us both promise to keep it a dead secret till 'e's gone, but out o' friendship to you I thought I'd slip over and let you know."

The emphasis on the words was unmistakable; Mrs. Kybird dropped her work and sat staring at him, while her husband wriggled with excitement.

"He ain't left it to me, I s'pose?" he said, with a feeble attempt at jocularity.

"Not a brass farden," replied his friend, cheerfully. "Not to none of you. Why should 'e?"

"He ain't left it to Jack, I s'pose?" said Miss Kybird, who had suspended her work to listen.

"No, my dear," replied the boarding-master. "He's made 'is will, all ship-shape and proper, and 'e's left everything, all that 'ouse property and other things, amounting to over ten thousand pounds, to a young man, becos 'e was jilt—crossed in love—a few months ago, and becos 'e's been a good and faithful servant to 'im for years."

"Don't tell me," said Mr. Kybird, desperately; "don't tell me that 'e's been and left all that money to young Teddy Silk."

"Well, I won't, if you don't want me to," said the accommodating Mr. Smith; "but mind, it's a dead secret."

Mr. Kybird wiped his brow, and red patches, due to

excitement, lent a little variety to an otherwise commonplace face; Mrs. Kybird's dazed inquiry, "Wot *are* we a-coming to?" fell on deaf ears; while Miss Kybird, leaning forward with lips parted, fixed her eyes intently on Mr. Smith's face.

"It's a pity 'e didn't leave it to young Nugent," said that gentleman, noting with much pleasure the effect of his announcement; "but 'e can't stand 'im at no price; he told me so 'imself. I s'pose young Teddy'll be quite the gentleman now, and he'll be able to marry who 'e likes."

Mr. Kybird thrust his handkerchief into his tail pocket, and all the father awoke within him.

"Ho, will he?" he said, with fierce sarcasm. "Ho, indeed! And wot about my daughter? I 'ave 'eard of such things as breach o' promise. Before Mr. Teddy gets married 'e's got to 'ave a few words with me."

"'E's behaved very bad," said Mrs. Kybird, nodding.

"'E come 'ere night after night," said Mr. Kybird, working himself up into a fury; "'e walked out with my gal for months and months, and then 'e takes 'imself off as if we wasn't good enough for 'im."

"The suppers 'e's 'ad 'ere you wouldn't believe," said Mrs. Kybird, addressing the visitor.

"Takes 'imself off," repeated her husband; "takes 'imself off as if we was dirt beneath 'is feet, and never been back to give an explanation from that day to this."

"I'm not easy surprised," said Mrs. Kybird. "I never was, from a gal; but I must say Teddy's been a surprise to me. If anybody 'ad told me he'd ha' behaved like that I wouldn't ha' believed it—I couldn't. I've never said much about it, becos my pride wouldn't let me. We all 'ave our faults, and mine is pride."

"I shall bring a breach o' promise action agin 'im for *five—thousand—pounds*," said Mr. Kybird, with decision.

"Talk sense," said Nathan Smith, shortly.

"Sense?" cried Mr. Kybird. "Is my gal to be played fast and loose with like that? Is my gal to be pitched over when 'e likes? Is my gal——"

"Wot's the good o' talking like that to *me?*" said the indignant Mr. Smith. "The best thing you can do is to get 'er married to Teddy at once. Afore 'e knows of 'is luck."

"And when'll that be?" inquired his friend, in a calm voice.

"Any time," said the boarding-master, shrugging his shoulders. "The old gentleman might go out to-night, or, agin, 'e might live on for a week or more. He was so weak 'e couldn't 'ardly sign 'is name."

"I 'ope 'e 'as signed it all right," said Mr. Kybird, starting.

"Safe as 'ouses," said his friend.

"Well, why not wait till Teddy 'as got the money?" suggested Mrs. Kybird, with a knowing shake of her head.

"Becos," said Mr. Smith, in a grating voice, "becos, for one thing, 'e'd be a rich man then and could 'ave 'is pick. Teddy Silk on a pound or thereabouts a week, and Teddy Silk with ten thousand pounds 'ud be two different people. Besides that, 'e'd think she was marrying 'im for 'is money."

"If 'e thought that," said Mrs. Kybird, firmly, "I'd never forgive 'im."

"My advice to you," said Nathan Smith, shaking his forefinger impressively, "is to get 'em married on the quiet and as soon as possible. Once they're tied up Teddy can't 'elp 'imself."

"Why on the quiet?" demanded Mr. Kybird, sharply.

The boarding-master uttered an impatient exclamation.

"Becos if Mr. Swann got to 'ear of it, he'd guess I'd been blabbing, for one thing," he said, sharply, "and for another he left it to 'im partly to make up for 'is disappointment. He'd been disappointed 'imself in 'is younger days, so 'e told me. Suppose 'e managed to get enough strength to alter 'is will?"

Mr. Kybird shivered.

"It takes time to get married, though," he objected.

"Yes," said Mr. Smith, ironically, "it does. Get round young Teddy, and then put the banns up. Take your time about it, and he sure and let Mr. Swann know. D'ye think 'e wouldn't understand wot it meant, and spoil it, to say nothing of Teddy seeing through it?"

"Well, wot's to be done, then?" inquired the staring Mr. Kybird.

"Send 'em up to London and 'ave 'em married by special license," said Mr. Smith, speaking rapidly, "to-morrow, if possible; if not, the day after. Go and pitch a tale to Teddy to-night, and make 'im understand it's to be done on the strict q.t."

"Special licenses cost money," said Mr. Kybird. "I 'ave 'eard it's a matter o' thirty pounds or thereabouts."

Mr. Nathan Smith rose, and his eyes were almost expressive. He nodded good-night to the ladies, and crossed to the door. Mrs. Kybird suddenly seized him by the coat and held him.

"Don't be in a 'urry, Nat," she pleaded. "We ain't all as clever as you are."

"Talk about looking a gift 'orse in the mouth——" began the indignant Mr. Smith.

"Sit down," urged Mr. Kybird. "You can't expect us to be as quick in seeing things as wot you are."

He pushed his partly mollified friend into his chair again, and, taking a seat next him, began to view the affair with enthusiasm.

"'Melia shall turn young Nugent off to-night," he said, firmly.

"That's right," said the other. "Go and do a few more silly things like that and we shall be 'appy. If you'd got a 'ed instead of—wot you 'ave got—you wouldn't talk of giving the show away like that. Nobody must know, or guess about anything, until young Teddy is married to 'Melia and got the money."

"It seems something like deceitfulness," said Miss Kybird, who had been listening to the plans for her future with admirable composure.

"It's for Teddy's own sake," said Nathan Smith; "everybody knows 'e's half crazy after you."

"I don't know that I don't like him best, even without the money," said Miss Kybird, calmly. "Nobody could 'ave been more attentive than 'im. I believe that 'e'd marry me if 'e 'ad a hundred thousand; but it looks better your way."

"Better all round," said Nathan Smith, with an approving nod. "Now, Dan'l, 'op round to Teddy and whistle 'im back, and mind 'e's to keep it a dead secret, on account o' trouble with young Nugent—d'ye twig?"

The admiring Mr. Kybird said that he was a wonder, and, in the discussion on ways and means which followed, sat listening with growing respect to the managing abilities, both of his friend and his wife. Difficulties were only mentioned for the purpose of being satisfactorily solved, and he noticed with keen appreciation that the prospect of a ten thousand pound son-in-law was already adding to that lady's dignity. She sniffed haughtily as she spoke of "that Nugent lot," and the manner in which she promised Mr. Smith that he

MR. KYBIRD AND HIS OLD FRIEND PARTED.

p. 157

should not lose by his services would have graced a duchess.

"I didn't expect to lose by it," said the boarding-master, pointedly. "Come over and 'ave a glass at the 'Chequers,' Dan, and then you can go along and see Teddy."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE summer evening was well advanced when Mr. Kybird and his old friend parted. The former gentleman was in almost a sentimental mood, and the boarding-master, satisfied that his pupil was in a particularly appropriate frame of mind for the object of his visit, renewed his instructions about binding Mr. Silk to secrecy, and departed on business of his own.

Mr. Kybird walked slowly towards Fullalove Alley, with his head sunk in meditation. He was anxious to find Mr. Silk alone, as otherwise the difficulty of his errand would be considerably increased, Mrs. Silk's intelligence being by no means obscured by any ungovernable affection for the Kybird family. If she was at home, he would have to invent some pretext for luring Teddy into the privacy of the open air.

The lamp was lit in the front room by the time he reached the house, and the shadows of geraniums which had won through several winters formed a straggling pattern on the holland blind. Mr. Kybird, first making an unsuccessful attempt to peep round the edges of this decoration, tapped gently on the door, and in response to a command to "come in," turned the handle and looked into the room. To his relief, he saw that Mr. Silk was alone.

"Good evening, Teddy," he said, with a polite smile, as he entered slowly and closed the door behind him. "I 'ope I see you well?"

"I'm quite well," returned Mr. Silk, gazing at him with unconcealed surprise.

"I'm glad to 'ear it," said Mr. Kybird, in a somewhat reproachful voice, "for your sake; for everybody's sake;

though p'r'aps I did expect to find you looking a little bit down. Ah, it's the wimmen that 'ave the 'arts, after all."

Mr. Silk coughed.

"What do you mean?" he inquired, somewhat puzzled.

"I come to see you, Teddy, on a very delikit business," said Mr. Kybird, taking a seat and gazing diffidently at his hat, as he swung it between his hands; "though as man to man I'm on'y doing of my dooty. But if you don't want to 'ear wot I've got to say, say so, and Dan'l Kybird'll darken your door no more."

"How can I know whether I want to 'ear it or not when I don't know what it is?" said Mr. Silk, judiciously.

Mr. Kybird sat biting his thumb-nails, then he looked up suddenly.

"'Melia," he said, with an outburst of desperate frankness, "'Melia is crying 'er eyes out."

Mr. Silk, with a smothered exclamation, started up from his chair and regarded him eagerly.

"If she knew I'd been 'ere," pursued Mr. Kybird, "she'd — I don't know wot she wouldn't do. That's 'er pride; but I've got my pride too—the pride of a father's 'art."

"What—what's she crying about?" inquired Mr. Silk, in an unsteady voice.

"She's been looking poorly for some time," continued the veracious Mr. Kybird, "and crying. When I tell you that part o' the wedding-dress wot she was making 'ad to be taken away from 'er because o' the tears she dropped on it, you may 'ave some idea of wot things are like. She's never forgot you, Teddy, and it was only your quick temper that day that made 'er take on with young Nugent. She's got a temper too, but she give 'er love once, and, being my daughter, she couldn't give it agin."

He stole a glance at his listener. Mr. Silk, very pale and upright, was standing on the hearthrug, shaking all over with nervous excitement. Twice he tried to speak and failed.

"That's 'ow it is, Teddy," sighed Mr. Kybird, rising as though to depart. "I've done my dooty. It was a 'ard thing to do, but I've done it."

"Do you mean," said Mr. Silk, recovering his voice at last, "do you mean that Amelia would marry me, after all?"

"Do I mean," repeated Mr. Kybird, naturally indignant that his very plain speaking should be deemed capable of any misconstruction. "Am I speaking to a stock or a stone, Teddy?"

Mr. Silk took a deep breath, and buttoned up his coat, as though preparing to meet Mr. Nugent there and then in deadly encounter for the person of Miss Kybird. The colour was back in his cheeks by this time, and his eyes were unusually bright. He took a step towards Mr. Kybird, and, pressing his hand warmly, pushed him back into a seat again.

"There's 'er pride to consider, Teddy," said the latter gen'leman, with the whisper of a conspirator. "She can't stand being talked about all over the town, and pointed at."

"Let me see anybody a-pointing at 'er," said the truculent Mr. Silk. "Let me see 'em, that's all."

"That's the way to talk, Teddy," said Mr. Kybird, gazing at him with admiration.

"Talk?" said the heroic Mr. Silk. "I'll do more than talk."

He clenched his fists and paced boldly up and down the hearthrug.

"You leave things to me," said Mr. Kybird, with a confidential wink. "I'll see that it's all right. All I ask of you is to keep it a dead secret; even your mother mustn't know."

"I'll be as secret as the grave," said the overjoyed Mr. Silk.

"There's lots o' things to be taken into consideration," said Mr. Kybird, truthfully; "it might be as well for you to be married immediate."

"Immediate?" said the astonished Mr. Silk.

"She 'asn't got the nerve to send young Nugent about 'is business," explained Mr. Kybird. "She feels sorry for 'im, poor fellow; but 'e's got a loving and affectionate 'art, and she can't bear 'im making love to 'er. You can understand what it is, can't you?"

"I can imagine it," said Mr. Silk, gloomily; and he flushed crimson as the possibilities suggested by the remark occurred to him.

"I've been thinking it over for some time," resumed Mr. Kybird, "twisting it and turning it all ways, and the on'y thing I can see for it is, for you to be married on the strict q.t. Of course, if you don't like——"

"*Like!*" repeated the transported Mr. Silk. "I'll go and be married now, if you like."

Mr. Kybird shook his head at such haste, and then, softening a little, observed that it did him credit. He proceeded to improve the occasion by anecdotes of his own courting, some thirty years before, and was in the middle of a thrilling account of the manner in which he had bearded the whole of his future wife's family, when a quick step outside, which paused at the door, brought him to a sudden halt.

"Mother," announced Mr. Silk, in a whisper.

Mr. Kybird nodded, and the heroic appearance of visage, which had accompanied his tale, gave way to an expression of some uneasiness. He coughed behind his hand and sat gazing before him as Mrs. Silk entered the room and gave vent to an exclamation of astonishment as she saw the visitor. She gazed sharply from him to her son. Mr. Kybird's expression was now normal, but, despite his utmost efforts, Mr. Silk could not entirely banish the smile which trembled on his lips.

"Me an' Teddy," said Mr. Kybird, turning to her with a little bob which served him for a bow, "'ave just been 'aving a little talk about old times."

"He was just passing," said Mr. Silk.

"Just passing, and thought I'd look in," said Mr. Kybird, with a careless little laugh; "the door was open a bit."

"Wide open," corroborated Mr. Silk.

"So I just came in to say 'ow d'ye do," said Mr. Kybird.

Mrs. Silk's sharp white face turned from one to the other.

"'Ave you said it?" she inquired, blandly.

"I 'ave," said Mr. Kybird, restraining Mr. Silk's evident intention of hot speech by a warning glance, "and now I'll just toddle off 'ome."

"I'll go a bit o' the way with you," said Edward Silk. "I feel as if a bit of a walk would do me good."

Left alone, the astonished Mrs. Silk took the visitor's vacant chair, and, with wrinkled brow, sat putting two and two together until the sum got beyond her powers of calculation. Mr. Kybird's affability and Teddy's cheerfulness were alike incomprehensible. She mended a hole in her pocket, and darned a pair of socks, and at last, anxious for advice, or at least a confidant, resolved to see Mr. Wilks.

She opened the door and looked across the alley, and saw

with some satisfaction that his blind was illuminated. She closed the door behind her sharply, and then stood gasping on the doorstep. So simultaneous were the two happenings, that it actually appeared as though the noise of her door had blown out Mr. Wilks's lamp. It was a night of surprises, but after a moment's hesitation she slipped over and tried his door. It was fast, and there was no answer to her knocking. She knocked louder, and listened. A door slammed violently at the back of the house, a distant clatter of what sounded like saucepans sounded from beyond, and above it all a tremulous but harsh voice bellowed industriously an interminable chantey. By the time the third verse was reached, Mr. Wilks's neighbours on both sides were beating madly upon their walls, and blood-curdling threats strained through the plaster.

She stayed no longer, but, regaining her own door, sat down again to await the return of her son. Mr. Silk was long in coming, and she tried in vain to occupy herself with various small jobs, as she speculated in vain on the meaning of the events of the night. She got up and stood by the open door, and as she waited the clock in the church-tower, which rose over the roofs hard by, slowly boomed out the hour of eleven. As the echoes of the last stroke died away the figure of Mr. Silk turned into the alley.

"You must 'ave 'ad quite a nice walk," said his mother, as she drew back into the room, and noted the brightness of his eye.

"Yes," was the reply.

"I s'pose 'e's been and asked you to the wedding?" said the sarcastic Mrs. Silk.

Her son started, and, turning his back on her, wound up the clock.

"Yes, 'e has," he said, with a sly grin.

Mrs. Silk's eyes snapped.

"Well, of all the impudence——" she said, breathlessly.

"Well, 'e has," said her son, hugging himself over the joke. "And, wot's more, I'm going."

He composed his face sufficiently to bid her good-night, and, turning a deaf ear to her remonstrances and inquiries, took up a candle, and went off whistling.

CHAPTER XXIV.

The idea in the mind of Mr. James Hardy when he concocted his infamous plot was that Jack Nugent would be summarily dismissed on some pretext by Miss Kybird, and that steps would at once be taken by her family to publish her banns together with those of Mr. Silk. In thinking thus, he had made no allowance for the workings and fears of such a capable mind as Nathan Smith's, and as days passed and nothing happened, he became a prey to despair.

He watched Mr. Silk keenly; but that gentleman went about his work in his usual quiet and gloomy fashion, and, after a day's leave, for the purpose of arranging the affairs of a sick aunt in Camberwell, came back as gloomy as before. It was also clear that Mr. Swann's complaisance was nearly at an end, and a letter—couched in vigorous, not to say regrettable, terms for a moribund man—expressed such a desire for fresh air and exercise, that Hardy was prepared to see him at any moment.

It was the more unfortunate, as he thought that he had of late detected a slight softening in Captain Nugent's manner towards him. On two occasions the captain, who was out when he called, had made no comment to find upon his return that the visitor was being entertained by his daughter, going so far, indeed, as to permit the conversation to gain vastly in interest by that young person remaining in the room. In face of this improvement, he thought with dismay of having to confess failure in a scheme which, apart from success, was inexcusable.

The captain had also unbent in another direction, and Mr. Wilks, to his great satisfaction, was allowed to renew his visits to Equator Lodge, and assist his old master in the garden. Here, at least, the steward was safe from the designs of Mrs. Silk and the innuendoes of Fullalove Alley.

It was at this time, too, that the widow stood in most need of his advice, the behaviour of Edward Silk being of a nature to cause misgivings in any mother's heart. A strange restlessness possessed him, varied with occasional outbursts of his hilarity and good nature. Dark hints emanated from him at these times concerning a surprise in store for her at no distant date, hints which were at once explained away in a most unsatisfactory manner when she became too pressing in her

inquiries. He haunted the High Street, and when the suspicious Mrs. Silk spoke of Amelia he only laughed and waxed humorous over such unlikely subjects as broken hearts and broken vows.

It was a week after Mr. Kybird's visit to the Alley that he went as usual for a stroll up and down the High Street. The evening was deepening, and some of the shops had already lit up as Mr. Silk, with his face against the window-pane, tried in vain to penetrate the obscurity of Mr. Kybird's shop. He could just make out a dim figure behind the counter, which he believed to be Amelia, when a match was struck, and a gas jet threw a sudden light in the shop, and revealed Mr. Jack Nugent standing behind the counter, with his hand on the lady's shoulder.

One glance was sufficient. The next moment there was a sharp cry from Miss Kybird, and a bewildered stare from Nugent, as something, only comparable to a human cracker, bounced into the shop and commenced to explode in front of them.

"Take your 'and off!" raved the cracker. "Leave 'er alone! 'Ow dare you? D'ye hear me? 'Melia, I won't 'ave it! I won't 'ave it!"

"Don't be silly, Teddy," remonstrated Mr. Nugent, following up Miss Kybird, as she edged away from him.

"Leave 'er alone, d'ye 'ear?" yelled Mr. Silk, thumping the counter with his small fist. "She's my *wife!*"

"Teddy's mad," said Mr. Nugent, calmly, "stark, staring, raving mad. Poor Teddy!"

He shook his head sadly, and had just begun to recommend a few remedies, when the parlour door opened and the figure of Mr. Kybird, with his wife standing close behind him, appeared in the doorway.

"Who's making all this noise?" demanded the former, looking from one to the other.

"*I* am," said Mr. Silk, fiercely. "It's no use your winking at me; I'm not going to 'ave any more of this nonsense. 'Melia, you go and get your 'at on and come off 'ome with me."

Mr. Kybird gave a warning cough.

"Go easy, Teddy," he murmured.

"And don't cough at me," said the irritated Mr. Silk, "because it won't do no good."

Mr. Kybird subsided. He was not going to quarrel with a son-in-law who might at any moment come in for ten thousand pounds.

"Isn't he mad?" inquired the annoyed Mr. Nugent.

"Cert'nly not," replied Mr. Kybird, moving aside to let his daughter pass; "no madder than you are. Wot d'ye mean? Mad?"

Mr. Nugent looked round in perplexity.

"Do you mean to tell me that Teddy and Amelia are married?" he said, in a voice trembling with eagerness.

"I do," said Mr. Kybird; "it seems they've been fond of one another all along, and they went up all unknown last Friday and got a license and got married."

"And if I see you putting your 'and on 'er shoulder agin ——" said Mr. Silk, with alarming vagueness.

"But suppose she asks me to?" said the delighted Mr. Nugent, with much gravity.

"Look 'ere, we don't want none o' your nonsense," broke in the irate Mrs. Kybird, pushing her way past her husband and confronting the speaker.

"I've been deceived," said Mr. Nugent, in a thrilling voice; "you've all been deceiving me. Kybird, I blush for you (that'll save you a lot of trouble). Teddy, I wouldn't have believed it of you. I can't stay here; my heart is broken."

"Well, we don't want you to," retorted the aggressive Mrs. Kybird. "You can take yourself off as soon as ever you like. You can't be too quick to please me."

Mr. Nugent bowed, and walked round the counter.

"And not even a bit of wedding-cake for me," he said, shaking a reproachful head at the heated Mr. Silk. "Why, I'd put you down first on *my* list."

He paused at the door, and, after a brief intimation that he would send for his effects on the following day, provided that his broken heart had not proved fatal in the meantime, waved his hand to the company and departed. Mr. Kybird followed him to the door as though to see him off the premises, and, gazing after the receding figure, swelled with indignation as he noticed that he favoured a mode of progression which was something between a walk and a hornpipe.

Mr. Nugent had not been in such spirits since his return to Sunwich, and, hardly able to believe in his good fortune, he walked on in a state of growing excitement until he was clear of the town. Then he stopped to consider his next move, and after a little deliberation resolved to pay a visit to Jem Hardy and acquaint him with the joyful tidings.

That gentleman, however, was out, and Mr. Nugent, somewhat irritated at such thoughtlessness, stood in the road wondering where to go to next. It was absolutely impossible for him to sleep that night without telling the good news to somebody, and after some thought he selected Mr. Wilks. It was true that relations had been somewhat strained between them since the latter's attempt at crimping him, but he was never one to bear malice, and to-night he was full of the kindliest thoughts to all mankind.

He burst into Mr. Wilks's front room suddenly, and then pulled up short. The steward, with a pitiable look of anxiety on his pallid features, was leaning awkwardly against the mantelpiece, and opposite him Mrs. Silk sat in an easy-chair, dissolved in tears.

"Busy, Sam?" inquired Mr. Nugent, who had heard of the steward's difficulties from Hardy.

"No, sir," said Mr. Wilks, hastily. "Sit down, sir."

He pushed forward a chair, and, almost pulling his visitor into it, stood over him attentively and took his hat.

"Are you quite sure I'm not interrupting you?" inquired the thoughtful Mr. Nugent.

"Certain sure, sir," said Mr. Wilks, eagerly. "I was just 'aving a bit of a chat with my neighbour Mrs. Silk 'ere, that's all."

The lady in question removed her handkerchief from her eyes and gazed at him with reproachful tenderness. Mr. Wilks plunged hastily into conversation.

"She came over 'ere to tell me a bit o' news," he said, eyeing the young man doubtfully. "It seems that Teddy——"

Mr. Nugent fetched a mighty sigh and shook his head; Mrs. Silk gazed at him earnestly.

"Life is full of surprises, sir," she remarked.

"And sadness," added Mr. Nugent. "I hope that they will be happy."

"It struck me all of a 'eap," said Mrs. Silk, rolling her handkerchief into a ball and placing it in her lap. "I was doing a bit of ironing, when in walks Teddy with Amelia Kybird, and says they was married last Friday. I was that shaken I didn't know what I did or what I said. Then I came over as soon as I could, because I thought Mr. Wilks ought to know about it."

Mr. Wilks cleared his throat and turned an agonised eye

on Mr. Nugent. He would have liked to have asked why Mrs. Silk should think it necessary to inform him, but the fear of precipitating a crisis stayed his tongue.

"What I'm to do I don't know," continued Mrs. Silk, feebly. "You can't 'ave two queens in one 'ouse."

"But she was walking out with Teddy long ago," urged Mr. Wilks; "it's no worse then than now."

"But I wouldn't be married by license," said Mrs. Silk, deftly ignoring the remark. "If I can't be asked in church in the proper way, I won't be married at all."

"Quite right," said Mr. Nugent. "There's something so sudden about a license," he added, with feeling.

"Me and Mr. Wilks was talking about marriage only the other day," pursued Mrs. Silk, with a bashfulness which set every nerve in the steward's body quivering, "and we both agreed that banns was the proper way."

"*You* was talking about it," corrected Mr. Wilks, in a hoarse voice. "You brought up the subject, and I agreed with you. Not that it matters to me 'ow people get married. That's their affair. Banns or license, it's all one to me."

"I won't be married by license," said Mrs. Silk, with sudden petulance; "leastways, I'd rather not be," she added, softening.

Mr. Wilks took his handkerchief from his pocket and blew his nose violently. Mrs. Silk's methods of attack left him little opportunity for the plain speaking which was necessary to dispel illusions. He turned a watery appealing eye on to Mr. Nugent, and saw to his surprise that that gentleman was winking at him with great significance and persistence. It would have needed a heart of stone to have been unaffected by such misery, and to-night Mr. Nugent, thankful for his own escape, was in a singularly merciful mood.

"All this sounds as though you are going to be married," he said, turning to Mrs. Silk with a polite smile.

The widow simpered and looked down, thereby affording Mr. Nugent an opportunity of another signal to the perturbed steward, who sat with such a look of anxiety on his face lest he should miss his cue, that the young man's composure was tried to the utmost.

"It's been an understood thing for a long time," she said, slowly, "but I couldn't leave my son while 'e was single and nobody to look after 'im. A good mother makes a good wife, so they say. A woman can't always 'ave 'er own way in

everything; and if it's not to be by banns, then by license it must be, I suppose."

"Well, he'll be a fortunate man, whoever he is," said Mr. Nugent, with another warning glance at Mr. Wilks; "and I only hope that he'll make a better husband than you do, Sam," he added, in a low but severe voice.

Mrs. Silk gave a violent start.

"Better husband than *'e* does?" she cried, sharply. "Mr. Wilks ain't married,"

Mr. Nugent's baseless charge took the steward all aback. He stiffened in his chair, a picture of consternation, and guilt appeared stamped on every feature. But he had the presence of mind to look to Mr. Nugent's eye for guidance and sufficient strength of character to accept this last bid for liberty.

"That's my business, sir," he quavered, in offended tones.

"But you ain't married," screamed Mrs. Silk.

"Never mind," said Nugent, pacifically. "Perhaps I ought not to have mentioned it; it's a sore subject with Sam. And I dare say there were faults on both sides; weren't there, Sam?"

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Wilks, in a voice which he strove hard to make distinct, "especially 'ers."

"You—you never told me you were married," said Mrs. Silk, breathlessly.

"I never said I wasn't," retorted the culprit, defiantly. "If people liked to think I was a single man, I don't care; it's got nothing to do with them. Besides, she lives at Stepney, and I don't 'ear from 'er once in six months. She don't interfere with me and I don't interfere with her."

Mrs. Silk got up from her chair and stood confronting him with her hand grasping the back of it. Her cold eyes gleamed and her face worked with spite, as she tried in vain to catch his eye. Of Mr. Nugent and his ingenuous surprise at her behaviour she took no notice at all.

"You're a deceiver!" she gasped. "You've been be'aving like a single man, and everybody thought you was a single man."

"I hope you haven't been paying attentions to anybody, Sam?" said Mr. Nugent, in a shocked voice.

"A—ah," said Mrs. Silk, shivering with anger. "Ask 'im, the deceiving villain! Ask anybody, and see what they'll tell

you. Oh, you wicked man! I wonder you can look me in the face."

Truth to tell, Mr. Wilks was looking in any direction but hers. His eyes met Nugent's, but there was a look of such stern disdain on that gentleman's face, that he was fain to look away again.

"Was it a friend of yours?" inquired the artless Mr. Nugent.

"Never mind," said Mrs. Silk, recovering herself. "Never mind who it was. You wait till I go and tell Teddy," she continued, turning to the trembling Mr. Wilks. "If 'e's got the 'art of a man in 'im you'll see."

With this dire threat, and turning occasionally to bestow another fierce glance upon the steward, she walked to the door and, opening it to its full extent, closed it behind her with a crash, and darted across the alley to her own house. The two men gazed at each other without speaking, and then Mr. Wilks, stepping over to the door, turned the key in the lock.

"You're not afraid of Teddy?" said the staring Nugent.

"Teddy!" said Mr. Wilks, snapping his huge fingers. "I'm not afraid o' fifty Teddies; but she might come back with 'im. If it 'adn't ha' been for you, sir, I don't know wot wouldn't 'ave happened."

"Go and draw some beer, and get me a clean pipe," said Nugent, dropping into a chair. "We've both been mercifully preserved, Sam, and the best thing we can do is to drink our noble selves and be more careful for the future."

Mr. Wilks obeyed, and again thanking him warmly for his invaluable services, sat down to compile a few facts about his newly acquired wife, warranted to stand the severest cross-examination which might be brought to bear upon them. A task interspersed with malicious reminiscences of Mrs. Silk's attacks on his liberty. He also insisted on giving up his bed to him for the night.

"I suppose," he said, later on, as Mr. Nugent, after a faint objection or two, took his candle, "I suppose this yarn about my being married will get about?"

"I suppose so," said Nugent, yawning, as he paused with his foot on the stair. "What about it?"

"Nothing," said Mr. Wilks, in a somewhat dissatisfied voice. "Nothing."

"What about it?" repeated Mr. Nugent, sternly.

"Nothing, sir," said Mr. Wilks, with an insufferable simper. "Nothing, only it'll make things a little bit slow for me—that's all."

Mr. Nugent eyed him for a space in speechless amazement, and then, with a few strong remarks on ingratitude and senile vanity, mounted the winding little stairs and went to bed.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE day after Mr. Silk's sudden and unexpected assertion of his marital rights Mr. Kybird stood in the doorway of his shop, basking in the sun. The High Street was in a state of post-prandial repose, and there was no likelihood of a customer to interfere with his confidential chat with Mr. Nathan Smith, who was listening with an aspect of great severity to his explanations.

"It ought not to have happened," he said, sharply.

"It was Teddy done it," said Mr. Kybird, humbly.

Mr. Smith shrugged his shoulders.

"It wouldn't 'ave happened if I'd been there," he observed, arrogantly.

"I don't see 'ow——" began Mr. Kybird.

"No, o' course you don't," said his friend. "Still, it's no use making a fuss now. The thing is done. One thing is, I don't suppose it'll make any diff——"

"Difference," suggested Mr. Kybird, after waiting for him to finish.

"Difference," said Mr. Smith, with an obvious effort. His face had lost its scornful expression, and given way to one almost sheepish in its mildness. Mr. Kybird, staring at him in some surprise, even thought that he detected a faint shade of pink.

"We ain't all as clever as wot you are, Nat," he said, somewhat taken aback at this phenomenon; "it wouldn't do."

Mr. Smith made a strange noise in his throat and turned

on him sharply. Mr. Kybird, still staring in surprise at his unwonted behaviour, drew back a little, and then his lips parted and his eyes grew round as he saw the cause of his friend's concern. An elderly gentleman, with a neatly trimmed white beard and a yellow rose in his button-hole, was just passing on the other side of the road. His tread was elastic, his figure as upright as a boy's, and he swung a light cane in his hand as he walked. As Mr. Kybird gazed, he bestowed a brisk nod upon the bewildered Mr. Smith, and crossed the road with the evident intention of speaking to him.

"How do, Smith?" he said in a kindly voice.

The boarding-master leaned against the shop-window and regarded him dumbly. There was a twinkle in the ship-broker's eyes which irritated him almost beyond endurance, and in the doorway Mr. Kybird, his face mottled with the intensity of his emotions, stood an unwelcome and frantic witness of his shame.

"You're not well, Smith," said Mr. Swann, shaking his head at him gently. "You look like a man who has been doing too much brain work lately. You've been getting the better of somebody, I know."

Mr. Smith gasped, and eyeing him wickedly, strove hard to recover his self-possession.

"I'm all right, sir," he said in a thin voice. "I'm glad to see you're looking a trifle better, sir."

"Oh, I'm quite right now," said the other, with a genial smile at the fermenting Mr. Kybird. "I'm as well as ever I was. Illness is a serious thing, Smith, but it is not without its little amusements."

Mr. Smith, scratching his smooth-shaven chin, and staring blankly in front of him, said that he was glad to hear it.

"I've had a long bout of it," continued the ship-broker. "Longer than I intended at first. By the way, Smith, you've never spoken to anybody of that business, of course?"

"Of course not, sir," said the boarding-master, grinding his teeth.

"One has fancies when one is ill," said Mr. Swann, in low tones, as his eye dwelt with pleasure on the strained features of Mr. Kybird. "I burnt the document five minutes after you had gone."

'Did you, reely?" said Mr. Smith, mechanically.

"I'm glad it was only you and the doctor that saw my foolishness," continued the other, still in a low voice. "Other people might have talked, but I knew that you were a reliable man, Smith—and you won't talk about it in the future, I'm quite certain of that. Good afternoon."

Mr. Smith said "Good afternoon," and stood watching the receding figure as though it belonged to a species hitherto unknown to him. Then he turned, in obedience to a passionate tug at his coat-sleeve from Mr. Kybird.

"Wot 'ave you got to say for yourself?" demanded that injured person, in tones of suppressed passion. "Wot do you mean by it? You've made a pretty mess of it, with your cleverness."

"Wonderful old gentleman, ain't he?" said the discomfited Mr. Smith. "Fancy 'im getting the better o' *me*. Fancy *me* being 'ad. I took it all in as innercent as you please."

"Ah, you're a clever fellow, you are," said Mr. Kybird, bitterly. "'Ere's Amelia lost young Nugent and 'is five 'undred all through you. It's a got-up thing between old Swann and the Nugent lot, that's wot it is."

"Looks like it," admitted Mr. Smith; "but fancy 'is picking *me* out for 'is little games. That's wot gets over me."

"Wot about all that money I paid for the license?" demanded Mr. Kybird, in a threatening manner. "Wot are you going to do about it?"

"You shall 'ave it," said the boarding-master, with sudden blandness; "and 'Melia shall 'ave 'er five 'undred."

"'Ow?" inquired the other, staring.

"It's as easy as easy," said Mr. Smith, who had been greatly galled by his friend's manner. "I'll leave it in my will. That's the cheapest way o' giving money I know of. And, while I'm about it, I'll leave you a decent pair o' trousers and a shirt with your own name on it."

While an ancient friendship was thus being dissolved, Mr. Adolphus Swann was on the way to his office. He could never remember such a pleasant air from the water, and such a vivid enjoyment in the sight of the work-a-day world. He gazed with delight at the crowd of miscellaneous shipping in the harbour and the bustling figures on the quay, only pausing occasionally to answer anxious inquiries concerning his health

from seafaring men in tarry trousers, who had waylaid him with great pains from a distance.

He reached his office at last, and, having acknowledged the respectful greetings of Mr. Silk, passed into the private room, and celebrated his return to work by at once arranging with his partner for a substantial rise in the wages of that useful individual.

"My conscience is troubling me," he declared, as he hung up his hat and gazed round the room with much relish.

"Silk is happy enough," said Hardy. "It is the best thing that could have happened to him."

"I should like to raise everybody's wages," said the benevolent Mr. Swann, as he seated himself at his desk. "Everything is like a holiday to me, after being cooped up in that bedroom; but the rest has done me a lot of good—so Blaikie says. And now what is going to happen to you?"

Hardy shook his head.

"Strike while the iron is hot," said the ship-broker. "Go and see Captain Nugent before he has got used to the situation. And you can give him to understand, if you like (only be careful how you do it), that I have got something in view which may suit his son. If you fail in this affair, after all I've done for you, I'll enter the lists myself."

The advice was good, but unnecessary, Mr. Hardy having already fixed on that evening as a suitable opportunity to disclose to the captain the nature of the efforts he had been making on his behalf. The success which had attended them had put him into a highly optimistic mood, and he set off for Equator Lodge with the confident feeling that he had, to say the least of it, improved his footing there.

Captain Nugent, called away from his labours in the garden, greeted his visitor in his customary short manner as he entered the room. "If you've come to tell me about this marriage, I've heard of it," he said, bluntly. "Murchison told me this afternoon."

"He didn't tell you how it was brought about, I suppose?" said Hardy.

The captain shook his head.

"I didn't ask him," he said, with affected indifference, and sat gazing out at the window, as Hardy began his narration.

Two or three times he thought he saw signs of appreciation in his listener's face, but the mouth under the heavy moustache was firm, and the eyes steady. Only when he related Swann's interview with Nathan Smith and Kybird did the captain's features relax. He gave a chuckling cough, and, feeling for his handkerchief, blew his nose violently. Then, with a strange gleam in his eye, he turned to the young man opposite.

"Very smart," he said, shortly.

"It was successful," said the other, modestly.

"Very," said the captain, as he rose and confronted him. "I am much obliged, of course, for the trouble you have taken in the affairs of my family. And now I will remind you of our agreement."

"Agreement?" repeated the other.

The captain nodded.

"Your visits to me were to cease when this marriage happened, if I wished it," he said, slowly.

"That was the arrangement," said the dumbfounded Hardy; "but I had hoped—besides, it has all taken place much sooner than I had anticipated."

"That was the bargain," said the captain, stiffly. "And now I'll bid you good-day."

"I am sorry that my presence should be so distasteful to you," said the mortified Hardy.

"Distasteful, sir," said the captain, sternly. "You have forced yourself on me twice a week for some time past. You have insisted upon talking on every subject under the sun, whether I liked it or not. You have taken every opportunity of evading my wishes that you should not see my daughter, and you wonder that I object to you. For absolute brazenness you beat anything I have ever encountered."

"I am sorry," said Hardy, again.

"Good evening," said the captain.

"Good evening."

Crestfallen and angry, Hardy moved to the door, pausing with his hand on it as the captain spoke again.

"One word more," said the older man, gazing at him oddly, as he stroked his grey beard. "If ever you try to come bothering me with your talk again, I'll forbid you the house."

"*Forbid me the house?*" repeated the astonished Hardy.

"That's what I said," replied the other. "That's plain English, isn't it?"

Hardy looked at him in bewilderment; then as the captain's meaning dawned upon him he stepped forward impulsively, and, seizing his hand, began to stammer out incoherent thanks.

"You'd better clear before I alter my mind," said Captain Nugent, roughly. "I've had more than enough of you. Try the garden if you like."

He took up a paper from the table, and resumed his seat, smiling grimly at the promptitude with which the other obeyed his instructions.

Miss Nugent, reclining in a deck-chair at the bottom of the garden, looked up as she heard his footstep on the gravel. It was a surprising thing to see him walking down the garden; it was still more surprising to observe the brightness of his eye and the general confidence of his bearing. It was evident that he was highly pleased with himself, and she was not satisfied until she had ascertained the reason. Then she sat silent, reflecting bitterly on the clumsy frankness of the male sex in general, and fathers in particular. A recent conversation with the captain, in which she had put in a casual word or two in Hardy's favour, was suddenly invested with a new significance. "I shall never be able to repay your father for his kindness," said Hardy, meaningly, as he took a chair near her.

"I expect he was pleased at this marriage," said Miss Nugent, coldly. "How did it happen?"

Mr. Hardy shifted uneasily in his chair.

"There isn't much to tell," he said, reluctantly, "and you —you might not approve of the means by which the end was gained."

"Still I want to hear about it," said Miss Nugent.

For the second time that evening Hardy told his story. It seemed more discreditable each time he told it, and he scanned the girl's face anxiously as he proceeded; but, like her father, she sat still and made no comment until he had finished. Then she expressed a strong feeling of gratitude that the Nugent family had not been mixed up in it.

"Why?" inquired Hardy, bluntly.

"I don't think it was a very nice thing to do," said Miss Nugent, with a superior air.

"It wouldn't have been a very nice thing for you if your brother had married Miss Kybird," said the indignant Jem.

"And you said, if you remember, that you didn't mind what I did."

"I don't," said Miss Nugent, noticing with considerable pleasure that the confident air of a few minutes ago had quite disappeared.

"You think I have been behaving badly," pursued Hardy.

"I would rather not say what I think," replied Miss Nugent, loftily. "I have no doubt you meant well, and I should be sorry to hurt your feelings."

"Thank you," said Hardy, and sat gloomily gazing about him.

For some time neither of them spoke.

"Where is Jack now?" inquired the girl at last.

"He is staying with me for a few days," said Hardy. "I hope sincerely that the association will not be injurious to him."

"Are you trying to be rude to me?" inquired Miss Nugent, raising her clear eyes to his.

"I am sorry," said Hardy, hastily. "You are quite right, of course. It was not a nice thing to do, but I would do a thousand times worse to please you."

Miss Nugent thanked him warmly; he seemed to understand her so well, she said.

"I mean," said Hardy, leaning forward and speaking with a vehemence which made the girl instinctively avert her head, "I mean that to please you would be the greatest happiness I could know. I love you."

Miss Nugent sat silent, and a strong sense of the monstrous unfairness of such a sudden attack possessed her. Such a declaration she felt ought to have been led up to by numerous delicate gradations of speech, each a little more daring than the last, but none so daring that they could not have been checked at any time by the exercise of a little firmness.

"If you would do anything to please me," she said, at length, in a low voice, and without turning her head, "would you promise never to try to see me or speak to me again, if I asked you?"

"No," said Hardy, promptly.

Miss Nugent sat silent again. She knew that a good woman should be sorry for a man in such extremity, and should endeavour to spare his feelings by softening her refusal as much as possible, little as he might deserve such consideration. But

man is impatient, and jumps at conclusions. Before she was halfway through the first sentence he leaned forward and took her hand.

"Oh, good-bye," she said, turning to him with a pleasant smile.

"I am not going," said Hardy, quietly. "I am never going," he added, as he took her other hand.

Captain Nugent, anxious for his supper, found them there still debating the point some two hours later. Kate Nugent, relieved at the appearance of her natural protector, clung to him with unusual warmth. Then, in a kindly hospitable fashion, she placed her other arm in that of Hardy, and they walked in grave silence to the house.

THE END.

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KID'S RIDE ON CHRISTMAS EVE.

THE mines had been shut down for six weeks, and money in the camp was scarce. Bad weather had set in early, and the continual rain found its way through the roof of many a cabin, and there was beginning to be sickness. In the cabin of Sandy Carson there was a little girl—the only little girl in the camp—very ill. A cold at first, then a fever had come, and day after day little, sunny-haired Nellie Carson, whom the miners had loved and petted and spoiled since the first day of her arrival, steadily grew worse and wasted away, until the whole camp spoke in whispers, even up at the "Red Light," where they were gambling.

Sandy Carson and his wife, with their one child, had arrived at the camp late in the fall, with barely enough money to pay the teamster who brought them, and there had been little mining weather since. As stated at the beginning, money in the camp was scarce, but it was, perhaps, more so in the Carson cabin than under any other roof in the Gulch. This fact had made no difference to Dr. Dick, who worked a claim in pleasant weather and practised medicine between times. He remained with the Carsons day and night almost, and the miners knew that he would save Nellie if human skill could avail.

They were as anxious as he to do what they could for the child, and had ordered expensive luxuries by the stage that came down twice a week from Green Valley, and once, by Dr. Dick's advice, they had summoned a great physician from the city, who had charged them one hundred dollars, only to tell them that Dr. Dick was doing all that anybody living could do, and that the fever must run its course.

To Dr. Dick, who now hung over the little sufferer's bed and watched the fluttering breath and felt the hot, wasted hand, it seemed that its course was about run. The parents, exhausted from watching, were in the next room asleep. His patient had been delirious at times, and as he leaned over her she began muttering. "Is it Christmas yet, mamma?" she whispered. "You said I could have a doll when Christmas came, and I want it so much, mamma; isn't it Christmas yet?"

Dr. Dick lifted up his head and stared about helplessly. It was Christmas Eve. He had scarcely thought of it himself until now; but the sick child, in her unconsciousness, had somehow remembered, and through the burning tide of fever had held fast to a promise of weeks before. The tide was running out now; its force was nearly spent. By morning he believed the moment would come that was to decide between life and death. If only the doll could be there to lie in her hand when consciousness came, there was just a chance that the decision might mean —life.

"Isn't it Christmas yet, mamma?" she repeated. "Isn't it Christmas yet?"

When Mrs. Carson awoke, Dr. Dick told her.

"Have you the doll?" he asked, anxiously.

Tears sprang to the poor woman's eyes.

"I have never bought it. I have promised it to her for a year. I told her that when Christmas came she should surely have it. Then we moved here, and Nellie was taken ill, and I did not remember; and oh, Dr. Dick, we have scarcely any money for food!"

Half an hour later Dr. Dick went over to the Red Light Hotel for supper. Lounging about the office was the usual crowd. Every other occupation ceased when the doctor entered.

"How is she? How is she tonight?" they asked, in a subdued chorus.

It was raining outside, and the new comer walked over to the fire.

"There'll be a change by morning or before. I can't tell till then."

He paused, and, turning suddenly, added, "Boys, is there anybody here

[*Continued on page 180.*

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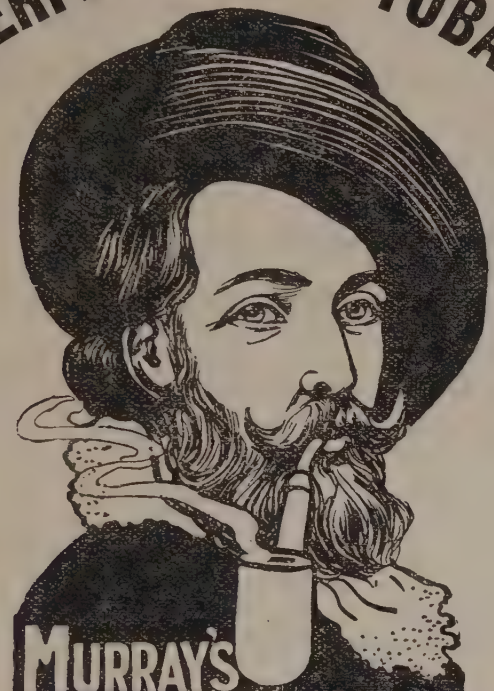

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that will ride over to Green Valley to-night?"

There was a moment of silence. Green Valley, the nearest town of any size, was a good twenty miles away, and the roads were believed to be impassable. The stage had missed two trips. Creeks were swollen, and the mud in places would be to the horses' knees. A gang of outlaws infested one part of the road, and the stage had been fired on. Presently one of the men spoke.

"Any of us would go," he said, "but I don't believe there's a horse in the camp that would carry a grown man there and back to-night, and the Kid here wouldn't care to risk it, I reckon."

"Let the Kid talk for himself," answered a brisk voice, and a boyish figure stepped out facing Dr. Dick. "What's wanted at Green Valley?"

The doctor looked at his questioner. The boy could not be more than seventeen, and was slight for his age. He was supposed to be a runaway, and had drifted into camp one day from nobody knew where. Since then he had been mining and gambling, and appeared to be an expert at both. He gave his name as Ellis, but the men had christened him the Kid, and when little Nell came he had, for some reason, become her slave. Since her illness he had gambled very little; during the last few days not at all.

"Well," said Dr. Dick, slowly, as he looked at the slender figure, "perhaps it is nothing that will do any good, but to-morrow will be Christmas, and the little girl has been promised a doll, and remembers it somehow, even in her fever. She is talking and raving about it, and when the change comes, if she is conscious, any disappointment would be bad, of course, and I thought maybe if we had the doll—a big doll—to put right before her—that perhaps——"

The boy wheeled, facing the listening men.

"Who's got a horse?" he demanded. "Get me a good horse and I'll be out of here in three minutes."

"I have! I have! Take mine!" came from different parts of the room.

"I've got the best horse in camp," said a heavy-shouldered man named Slag. "I'll have her here by the time you're ready," and he disappeared without waiting for a reply.

"The Kid will need money; chip in, boys," said another, holding out his hat.

The coins rattled into it while the boy was making his only preparation for the ride—drawing on an oiled coat called a slicker, loaned him by one of the men. When the hat, heavy with silver, was handed to him he passed it over to Dr. Dick.

"Give that to her folks," he said. "They need it. I'll pay for the doll myself." And without stopping for reply or comment he hurried out to where Slag was waiting with a large, handsome mare, that was tossing her head and stamping in the falling rain.

"She'll take you there and back if any horse can to-night," said Slag.

The miners crowded round to see him off. It was already dark, and the rain was falling heavily.

"Hold her up stream, Kid, when you ford," called one. "Never let her head get down stream."

"You'd better lead her when you get to Long Cliff," said another. "The road must be cut out bad there. She might go over."

"Nance knows every foot o' the way," said Slag. "He don't need to lead her none."

"Take my gun, Kid," said a big-bearded fellow called Whiskers, holding up an immense revolver.

"Too heavy. Got one, thank you. Good-bye, boys. I'll be back by daylight if I come at all"; and with a signal to the restless mare the boy bounded away into the night and rain.

The men, listening in silence, heard the splash of the mare's feet until he reached the woods.

"That Kid's a brick," said Whiskers, "but I wish he'd taken my gun."

"The less he has to carry the better," said Dr. Dick. "He's light and got a good horse. It's a fearful ride, but he may make it."

They entered, and the doctor, after a hasty supper, returned to the Carson cabin.

* * * * *

The last clerk in the big general store at Green Valley was just getting ready to close for the night. It was

[*Continued on page 182.*

SPENCER LEIGH HUGHES, *Editor of "The Morning Leader,"* writes: "I regard my 'Swan' Fountain Pen as a great Moral Influence. For me there are now no wild dabs at the ink-pot, no blots, no fishing up hairs, no ink-slinging, &c., and in consequence of all this I am no longer goaded into the use of expletives. It would be really hard work to write a libel with a 'Swan' Fountain Pen. I have tried, and I found myself writing a benediction."

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past eleven, and the final straggling Christmas Eve customers were gone. He stood in the door for a moment, looking out into the darkness and rain and muttering to himself.

"I hate these kind of Christmases," he grumbled; "I don't mind if it's cold, but this rain, rain, rain, and mud and slop all over everything, knocks trade silly, and I'll bet there ain't twenty couples over yonder at the dance."

The sound of music came across through the rain, and the blurred lights showed where the society of Green Valley was making merry on Christmas Eve.

He was about to turn back to make the final preparations for closing, when another sound came to him from far down the street. It was the splash of horse's hoofs.

"Hulloa!" he exclaimed, "somebody's coming in late to the dance, I reckon!"

But the horseman was turning directly towards the store, and presently dismounted where the light shone out into the falling rain. He flung the bridle over a hitching-post, as he called out to the staring clerk:—

"Get out the biggest and finest doll you've got, quick!"

The clerk, hastening to obey, still stared at the figure that now entered.

He saw that it was a boy or a small man, but that was all he could tell. The Kid was a mass of mud from head to foot, and he staggered a little as he walked.

"I rode over from the Gulch since seven," he said, as he noticed the clerk's curiosity. "It's not very fast ridin', but the roads are pretty soft, and I s'pose I'm some muddy."

"From the Gulch? Muddy?"

The clerk put down the box in his hands and looked at the boy in amazement.

"Yes; and I've got to get back by daylight with that doll. Hurry up with it! The biggest and highest-priced you've got. It's for a little girl that's about to die, and Dr. Dick thinks it may save her if we get it there in time. You can tie it up good and fasten it to me under the slicker."

The astonished clerk hurriedly opened two or three cardboard boxes containing waxen-faced dolls. The largest box held a fully dressed doll with eyes that opened and closed.

"I'll take this one," said the Kid. "Put it up in thick paper and use a lot of big, strong string."

"That doll is fifteen dollars," said the clerk, hesitatingly.

"If it costs fifty dollars, I want it," answered the Kid, sharply, "and I want it in a hurry."

He reached one muddy hand under the oil-coat as he spoke and drew out a little sack.

"Help yourself out of that," he said, dropping it on the counter.

The clerk did up the doll in a stout package. The Kid opened the slicker.

"Tie it round me, high up as you can; more to the right.

"Why, you're only a boy," exclaimed the clerk, getting now close to the Kid's face.

"Yes; that's why I came. A man would have been too heavy for the mare to carry over the roads."

"Are the creeks up high? Did you have to swim, I mean?"

"Three times. They'll be higher still going back."

"Dark, ain't it? Could you see any at all?'

"Just the tree-tops a little; but the mare knows the road."

"Do you think you'll get back all right?"

"I've got to. Say, run that string up over my shoulder. There, that'll stay, I guess. Now take out your money and tie that sack to my belt. That'll do. Good-night."

"Wait a minute," called the clerk. "Here, take this to the little girl as a merry Christmas from me."

He went to a show-case and took out a beautiful shiny breastpin and a pair of earrings, all on a card together.

"I can slip these in the packet all right," he said. "I saved what they cost by not going to a dance to-night, and maybe they'll help some too."

"Oh, sure!" said the Kid; "girls always like jewellery. Thank you."

He hurried out to where the big mare was standing in the rain, staring into the lighted store.

"We've got to try it again, Nance, old girl," he said. "We had a hard pull coming over, and it'll be worse going back, but we've got to get there.

[*Continued on page 184.*

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Nellie Carson's got to have this doll and jewellery to-morrow morning. She'll die if she don't get it, Nance, and we're not going to let Nellie die if we can help it."

The noble mare, who was a mass of mud like himself, whinnied a little and seemed to understand. A moment later the Kid was dashing back down the street into the blackness that lay between him and the little girl who was battling with death in Sandy Carson's cabin. As he sped along he could see her round, sunny face as she had looked before her illness, and he could see beside it another face—the face of another Nellie, his little sister back in the East, whom he had not seen for two years. He had idolised her, but he remembered bitterly how even his love for her had not been strong enough to keep him out of bad company, and how, when his father had reproved him, he had fled from his home in anger and never returned. He had spent a year at another camp before coming to the Gulch, and had always been lucky, but the memory of little sister Nellie had never dimmed.

It was for this reason that Nellie Carson had become his pet, and because of this that during her illness he had led a better life. He could not bear the thought of her dying, and he shuddered to think that even if he reached the Gulch safely he might not be in time. He urged the mare forward. There was a fairly good stretch of road for some distance out of Green Valley, and they were making good headway. Then they entered the heavy woods, and the roads became slippery. He was obliged to go slower here and let the mare pick her way. A mile farther on there was a swift stream that they had forded with difficulty. He knew that it was still rising, and he was anxious to get there as soon as possible. The darkness in the woods was intense, and he was obliged to trust to the mare entirely. The faithful animal kept steadily on, now on one side of the road, now on the other, seeming to know by instinct the safest path.

He could hear the stream roaring before they got to it.

"It will be a tough pull, Nance," he reflected, "but we've got to make it."

He could not tell in the darkness when they reached the brink, until he felt the mare plunge forward and the water rise about his legs.

"Head up stream, Nance! Head up stream, old girl!"

He felt her struggling powerfully under him, but he could have no means of knowing when they were near the other bank. Suddenly it seemed to him that they had drifted down out of the open road, and thick woods were on both sides. If they were between the steep banks they were lost. He leaned forward, striving to pierce a little way into the blackness. All at once he felt a branch sweep across his face. They were in the woods! At the same instant the mare stopped swimming. She had given up the struggle! But no, for he felt her plunging and battling for a foothold on solid ground. They had reached the other bank, and she was climbing where it was steep and slippery. He gave her the rein, and all at once he found himself saying a prayer.

"God help me to reach the Gulch!" he whispered. "God help me to reach Nellie in time!"

He clung to the struggling mare's mane, and after what seemed an eternity to the boy he felt that they had reached the level ground. Then he knew from the branches against his face that they were in the woods, and a little later they were back on the road.

"Good Nance!" he said, patting her neck; "good, beautiful Nance!"

There was better going here again, and for another five miles they did very well. Then they forded the second stream, which was not so swift. Just beyond was a stretch of hilly, rough road, and it was here that the Green Valley stage had been fired upon. He had not feared a hold-up, for he thought highwaymen would hardly expect prey on such a night. The hills were slippery, and the mare toiled slowly from side to side among the boulders. As they reached the upper plane and a more level stretch of road, she settled once more into the swinging gallop with which she had covered each bit of decent going. He noticed that the rain had well-nigh ceased, and that there seemed

[*Continued on page 186.*

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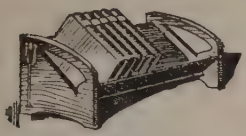

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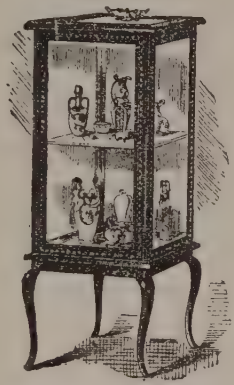

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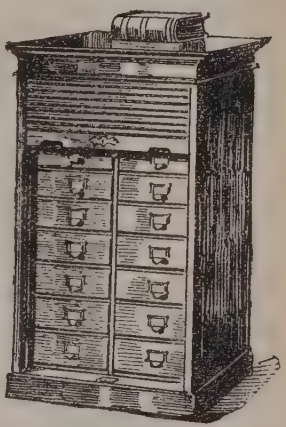

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to be a breaking in the sky. Perhaps it would be clear and sunny for Christmas. For a moment he forgot that darkness and danger shut him in, when suddenly the mare gave a snort and plunged so quickly to one side that the Kid was almost unseated. Then his heart stood still, for he heard men's muffled voices, and then a sharp, quick call of :—

"Halt!"

The Kid imagined he saw the outlines of a man at Nance's head.

"Let go of that, you scoundrel!" he screamed, and drove his heels against the mare's sides.

There was a smothered curse as Nance tore her head free and dashed forward. The Kid saw the dark outline go down as he passed, and then he heard horses' hoofs behind him in pursuit.

The light in the sky was getting somewhat stronger, and the rain had almost entirely ceased. They were on the high, open ground, and the boy felt that they could see his form against the horizon.

"Good Nance, beautiful Nance," he whispered, and repeated again and again the low signal that urged her forward. "We must beat these cut-throats; we must get to the Gulch with Nellie's doll. You can do it, Nance! You can do it! God will help you to do it, Nance! Oh, God, if you will help Nance to beat these cut-throats, I will be a better boy! I will write home and I will never touch another card. Only help Nance to get there in time with Nellie's doll."

He repeated this prayer over and over, and he believed they were slowly leaving their pursuers. It was no more than a mile now to the third and last ford. If he could beat them there he did not believe they would dare to cross.

"We are going to do it, Nance!" he murmured, and then suddenly from behind came two sharp reports on the night.

The Kid felt his right shoulder shrink with a fierce pain for a moment, and then grow numb.

"Nance! Oh, Nance! They have shot me!" he moaned. "The cowards have shot me!"

The mare had bounded forward at the shots and was now running wildly.

"Keep it up, Nance—keep it up! I'll hang on if I can. Oh, God, help me to hang on!"

He bound his hands to the saddle with the bridle-rein, and pulled the end through tight with his teeth. Then he leaned forward and closed his eyes, for he was growing faint. Presently he felt the mare's forefeet plunge downwards, and a moment later the cold water was once more about his legs.

"Head up stream, Nance, head up stream, old girl," he muttered, faintly, and then the night and the roar of water and the sound of distant hoofs whirled and mingled and blended into blackness and silence.

* * * * *

The Carson cabin was a few hundred yards from the "Red Light," on the Green Valley road. A group of men stood about its humble door, waiting. Waiting for dawn, waiting for the word that came now and then from the fever-wasted girl within; waiting for the splash of hoofs that would announce the Kid's return. They had been there since three o'clock. The rain ceased and the sky was almost clear. They talked little and in whispers, and when Dr. Dick came out and spoke to them they hung upon his words. It was after five o'clock now, and the sky was getting grey. Some of the men arose at times and walked as far as the edge of the woods to listen. They returned silently, and then others would go and also return.

"He ought to be comin' by now," said Slag, who had scarcely spoken before. "It's a mighty bad road, but Nance could get over it by this time, ef—ef the creeks wasn't too high so's they—so's they couldn't get acrost, though, o' course, they'd try it. That Kid and Nance 'ud try anything."

This was the first suggestion that anyone had made aloud that perhaps the Kid might not return, and it cast an added gloom over the silent group. Dr. Dick came to the door just then. He stood outside, listening anxiously.

"She is between life and death," he whispered. "She is likely to wake

[*Continued on page 188.*

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any moment now. If only the boy would come!"

Then he went back, and there was another period of silence and anxious waiting. By and bye the door opened more quickly than usual, and Dr. Dick stepped out again.

"She is waking," he whispered. "If the boy doesn't come now it will be too late."

He peered down the dim road, listening intently. The morning was very still, and the least sound could be heard. All at once from the edge of the woods there came a call. It was from two men who had walked down the road to listen.

"He's coming," they called. "We can hear the hoofs."

The men leaped to their feet and listened. Far down the road, somewhere in the woods, they could hear the sound too.

Slag ran a few steps forward.

"That's Nance!" he exclaimed, under his breath. "I know her gait."

They saw the two men returning at a run, and then out of the woods behind them came the horse. She passed them and came straight to Slag, who had stepped forward to meet her. She was a mass of mud, and upon her back there hung another mud-covered object that made no movement or sound.

"Kid! Kid!" cried Whiskers, shaking him. "Are you asleep? Did you bring the doll?"

There was no answer. Then they saw that his hands were bound to the saddle. In a second they had lifted him down and slipped off the slicker. They saw the package containing the doll, and, cutting it from him, handed it to Dr. Dick, who turned hastily with it into the cabin, and a moment later returned.

"The boy is hurt," he said, briefly. "There was blood on the parcel."

He kneeled down in the dim light and laid his ear to the Kid's heart.

"Carry him over to the 'Red Light,'" he commanded. "Quick!"

Whiskers lifted the slender form in his arms and carried it as he would an infant.

* * * * *

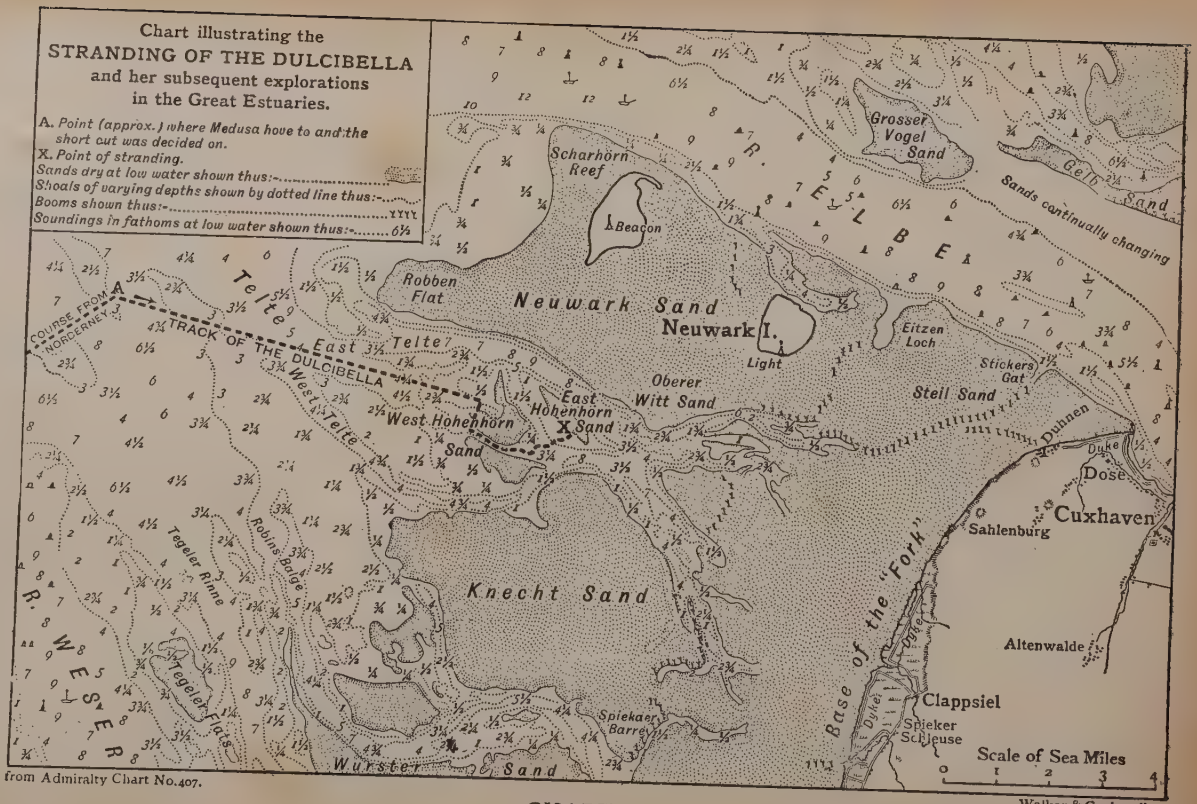
Three hours later the sweet Christmas sunlight was shining into the upper south room of the "Red Light," where the Kid was lying. Dr. Dick was bending over him, and a silent group was gathered in the hall, peering through the open door. The boy opening his eyes, did not at first realise where he was. Then he said, faintly:—

"Did I make it in time, doc? Was the doll all right, and—and will she —will she get well?"

"Yes, my boy; you saved her. She will get well, and you will get well too—God bless you!"

And there was not one of the silent listening group outside but repeated fervently, "God bless him! God bless the Kid!"

Walker & Cockerell's



from Admiralty Chart No. 407.

CHART A.

Walker & Cockerell sc.

THE RIDDLE OF THE SANDS

A RECORD OF SECRET SERVICE

ERSKINE CHILDERS

LONDON
GEORGE NEWNES, LIMITED
SOUTHAMPTON ST., STRAND, W.C.
BY ARRANGEMENT WITH MESSRS. SMITH, ELDER & CO.

PREFACE
TO THE PRESENT EDITION

In appealing to the wider circle of readers which a Sixpenny Edition may be expected to command, I venture to express the hope that nobody will read into this story of adventure any intention of provoking feelings of hostility to Germany, with whom, happily, far friendlier relations have recently been established. I think, indeed, that the disclaimer is scarcely necessary, and that any fair-minded reader will recognise that the strategical problem with which the book deals is treated practically, and not sentimentally. It is true that the fundamental purpose is to stimulate interest in a matter of vital national importance to Great Britain; but the naval progress and naval aspirations of Germany — perhaps the most interesting phenomena in the evolution of modern Europe—receive sincere and unstinted admiration. The high problems of national defence may be studied without a particle of racial animus. They are so studied, as a matter of mere routine, by the experts; they should be so studied, to the best of his ability, by every thoughtful citizen. That is the only way of exterminating the scaremonger, who trades on public ignorance. It is the only way of creating a community sanely conscious of its own powers, limitations, and duties,

> "Cleansed of servile panic, slow to hate or despise,
> Humble because of knowledge, mighty by sacrifice."

I have left the explanatory "Epilogue" just as I wrote it five years ago, but I cannot omit a reference to the wholesome and vigorous revolution in Admiralty policy which has been carried into effect since that time. It is no longer true that we have "no North Sea Fleet and no North Sea Policy." Yet I venture to think that there are many points in which this book may still be instructive.

PREFACE TO THE ORIGINAL EDITION

A word about the origin and authorship of this book.

In October last (1902), my friend "Carruthers" visited me in my chambers, and, under a provisional pledge of secrecy, told me frankly the whole of the adventure described in these pages. Till then I had only known as much as the rest of his friends, namely, that he had recently undergone experiences during a yachting cruise with a certain Mr. "Davies" which had left a deep mark on his character and habits.

At the end of his narrative—which, from its bearing on studies and speculations of my own, as well as from its intrinsic interest and racy delivery, made a very deep impression on me—he added that the important facts discovered in the course of the cruise had, without a moment's delay, been communicated to the proper authorities, who, after some dignified incredulity, due in part, perhaps, to the pitiful inadequacy of their own secret service, had, he believed, made use of them, to avert a great national danger. I say "he believed," for though it was beyond question that the danger was averted for the time, it was doubtful whether they had stirred a foot to combat it, the secret discovered being of such a nature that mere suspicion of it on this side was likely to destroy its efficacy.

There, however that may be, the matter rested for a while, as, for personal reasons which will be manifest to the reader, he and Mr. "Davies" expressly wished it to rest.

But events were driving them to reconsider their decision. These seemed to show that the information wrung with such peril and labour from the

German Government, and transmitted so promptly to our own, had had none but the most transitory influence on our policy. Forced to the conclusion that the national security was really being neglected, the two friends now had a mind to make their story public; and it was about this that "Carruthers" wished for my advice. The great drawback was that an Englishman, bearing an honoured name, was disgracefully implicated, and that unless infinite delicacy were used, innocent persons, and, especially, a young lady, would suffer pain and indignity, if his identity were known. Indeed, troublesome rumours, containing a grain of truth and a mass of falsehood, were already afloat.

After weighing both sides of the question, I gave my vote emphatically for publication. The personal drawbacks could, I thought, with tact be neutralised; while, from the public point of view, nothing but good could come from submitting the case to the common sense of the country at large. Publication, therefore, was agreed upon, and the next point was the form it should take. "Carruthers," with the concurrence of Mr. "Davies," was for a bald exposition of the essential facts, stripped of their warm human envelope. I was strongly against this course, first, because it would aggravate instead of allaying the rumours that were current; secondly, because in such a form the narrative would not carry conviction, and would thus defeat its own end. The persons and the events were indissolubly connected; to evade, abridge, suppress, would be to convey to the reader the idea of a concocted hoax. Indeed, I took bolder ground still, urging that the story should be made as explicit and circumstantial as possible, frankly and honestly for the purpose of entertaining and so of attracting a wide circle of readers. Even anonymity was undesirable. Nevertheless, certain precautions were imperatively needed.

To cut the matter short, they asked for my assistance and received it at once. It was arranged that I should edit the book; that "Carruthers" should give me his diary and recount to me in fuller detail and from his own point of view all the phases of the "quest," as they used to call it; that Mr. "Davies" should meet me with his charts and maps and do the same; and that the whole story should be written, as from the mouth of the former, with its humours and errors, its light and its dark side, just as it happened; with the following few limitations. The year it belongs to is disguised; the names of persons are throughout fictitious; and, at my instance, certain slight liberties have been taken to conceal the identity of the English characters.

Remember, also, that these persons are living now in the midst of us, and if you find one topic touched on with a light and hesitating pen, do not blame the Editor, who, whether they are known or not, would rather say too little than say a word that might savour of impertinence.

E. C.

March, 1903.

NOTE

THE fragments of charts (Charts A and B) are reproductions, on a slightly reduced scale, and omitting some confusing and irrelevant details, of British and German Admiralty Charts. Space precludes the insertion of those bulky engravings in full; but the reader who wishes for fuller information is referred to Charts Nos. 406 and 407 of the British series, and to No. 64 of the German series.

The maps, namely, the frontispiece and Map B, are necessarily on a very small scale; but can be supplemented by reference to standard publications.

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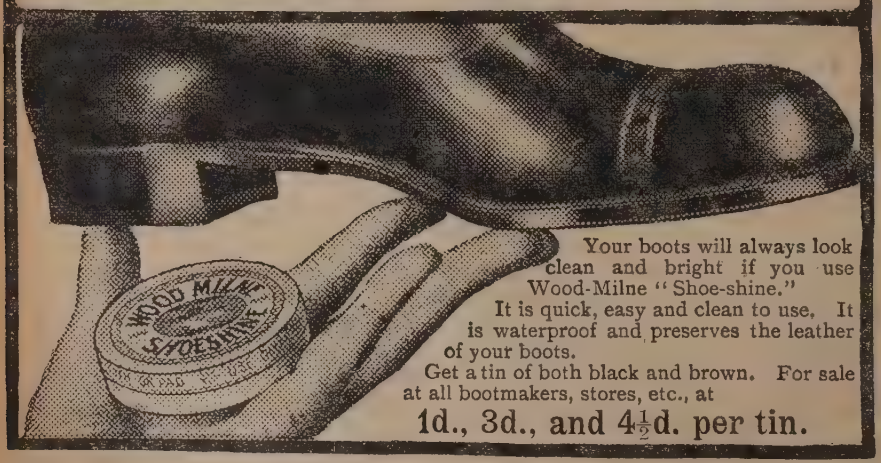

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	THE LETTER	9
II.	THE "DULCIBELLA"	12
III.	DAVIES	19
IV.	RETROSPECT	24
V.	WANTED, A NORTH WIND	28
VI.	SCHLEI FIORD	32
VII.	THE MISSING PAGE	36
VIII.	THE THEORY	42
IX.	I SIGN ARTICLES	48
X.	HIS CHANCE	52
XI.	THE PATHFINDERS	56
XII.	MY INITIATION	61
XIII.	THE MEANING OF OUR WORK	66
XIV.	THE FIRST NIGHT IN THE ISLANDS	68
XV.	BENSERSIEL	73
XVI.	COMMANDER VON BRÜNING	76
XVII.	CLEARING THE AIR	83
XVIII.	IMPERIAL ESCORT	88
XIX.	THE RUBICON	91
XX.	THE LITTLE DRAB BOOK	98
XXI.	BLINDFOLD TO MEMMERT	103
XXII.	THE QUARTETTE	110
XXIII.	A CHANGE OF TACTICS	116
XXIV.	FINESSE	122
XXV.	I DOUBLE BACK	130
XXVI.	THE SEVEN SIELS	135
XXVII.	THE LUCK OF THE STOWAWAY	141
XXVIII.	WE ACHIEVE OUR DOUBLE AIM	148
	EPILOGUE	153

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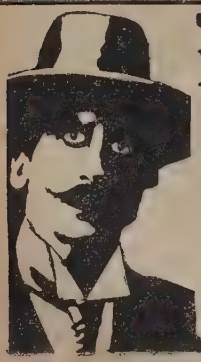

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MAPS AND CHARTS

MAP A ... ... *(Back of Frontispiece)*

CHART A ... ... *(Facing Title Page)*

FACING PAGE

MAP B 28

CHART B 29

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THE RIDDLE OF THE SANDS

CHAPTER ONE

THE LETTER

HAVE read of men who, when forced by their calling to live for long periods in utter solitude—save for a few black faces—have made it a rule to dress regularly for dinner in order to maintain their self-respect and prevent a relapse into barbarism. It was in some such spirit, with an added touch of self-consciousness, that, at seven o'clock in the evening of September 23rd in a recent year, I was making my evening toilet in my chambers in Pall Mall. I thought the date and the place justified the parallel; to my advantage even; for the obscure Burmese administrator might well be a man of blunted sensibilities and coarse fibre, and at least he is alone with nature, while I—well, a young man of condition and fashion, who knows the right people, belongs to the right clubs, has a safe, possibly a brilliant, future in the Foreign Office—may be excused for a sense of complacent martyrdom, when, with his keen appreciation of the social calendar, he is doomed to the outer solitude of London in September. I say "martyrdom," but in fact the case was infinitely worse. For to feel oneself a martyr, as everybody knows, is a pleasurable thing, and the true tragedy of my position was that I had passed that stage. I had enjoyed what sweets it had to offer in ever dwindling degree since the middle of August, when ties were still fresh and sympathy abundant. I had been conscious that I was missed at Morven Lodge party. Lady Ashleigh herself had said so in the kindest possible manner, when she wrote to acknowledge the letter in which I explained, with an effectively austere reserve of language, that circumstances compelled me to remain at my office. "We know how busy you must be just now," she wrote; "and I do hope you won't overwork; we shall *all* miss you very much." Friend after friend "got away" to sport and fresh air, with promises to write and chaffing condolences, and, as each deserted the sinking ship, I took a grim delight in my misery, positively almost enjoying the first week or two after my world had been finally dissipated to the four bracing winds of heaven. I began to take a spurious interest in the remaining five millions, and wrote several clever letters in a vein of cheap satire, indirectly suggesting the pathos of my position, but indicating that I was broad-minded enough to find intellectual entertainment in the scenes, persons, and habits of London in the dead season. I even did rational things at the instigation of others. For, though I should have liked total isolation best, I, of course, found that there was a sediment of unfortunates like myself, who, unlike me, viewed the situation in a most prosaic light. There were river excursions, and so on, after office-hours; but I dislike the river at any time for its noisy vulgarity, and most of all at this season. So I dropped out of the fresh-air brigade and declined H—'s offer to share a riverside cottage and run up to town in the mornings. I did spend one or

two week-ends with the Catesbys in Kent; but I was not inconsolable when they let their house and went abroad, for I found that such partial compensations did not suit me. Neither did the taste for satirical observation last. A passing thirst, which I dare say many have shared, for adventures of the fascinating kind described in the "New Arabian Nights" led me on a few evenings into some shady haunts in Soho and further eastward; but was finally quenched one sultry Saturday night after an hour's immersion in the reeking atmosphere of a low music-hall in Ratcliffe Highway, where I sat next a portly female who suffered from the heat, and at frequent intervals refreshed herself and an infant from a bottle of tepid stout.

By the first week in September I had abandoned all palliatives, and had settled into the dismal but dignified routine of office, club, and chambers. And now came the most cruel trial, for the hideous truth dawned on me that the world I found so indispensable could after all dispense with me. It was all very well for Lady Ashleigh to assure me that I was deeply missed; but by a letter from F—, who was one of the party, written "in haste, just starting to shoot," and coming as a tardy reply to one of my cleverest, made me aware that the house party had suffered little from my absence, and that few sighs were wasted on me, even in the quarter which I had assumed to have been discreetly alluded to by the underlined *all* in Lady Ashleigh's "we shall *all* miss you." A thrust which smarted more, if it bit less deeply, came from my cousin Nesta, who wrote: "It's horrid for you to have to be baking in London now; but, after all, it must be a great pleasure to you" (malicious little wretch!) "to have such interesting and important work to do." Here was a nemesis for an innocent illusion I had been accustomed to foster in the minds of my relations and acquaintances, especially in the breasts of the trustful and admiring maidens whom I had taken down to dinner in the last two seasons; a fiction which I had almost reached the point of believing in myself. For the plain truth was that my work was neither interesting nor important, and consisted chiefly at present in smoking cigarettes, in saying that Mr. So-and-so was away and would be back about October 1st, in being absent for lunch from twelve till two, and in my spare moments making *précis* of—let us say—the less confidential consular reports, and squeezing the results into cast-iron schedules. The reason of my detention was not a cloud on the international horizon—though I may say in passing that there was such a cloud—but a caprice on the part of a remote and mighty personage, the effect of which, ramifying downwards, had dislocated the carefully-laid holiday plans of the humble juniors, and in my own small case had upset the arrangement between myself and K—, who positively liked the dog-days in Whitehall.

Only one thing was needed to fill my cup of bitterness, and this it was that specially occupied me as I dressed for dinner this evening. Two days more in this dead and fermenting city and my slavery would be at an end. Yes, but—irony of ironies!—I had nowhere to go to! The Morven Lodge party was breaking up. A dreadful rumour as to an engagement which had been one of its accursed fruits tormented me with the fresh certainty that I had not been missed, and bred in me that most desolating brand of cynicism which is produced by defeat through insignificance. Invitations for a later date, which I had declined in July with a gratifying sense of being much in request, now rose up spectrally to taunt me. There was at least one which I could easily have revived, but neither in this case nor in any other had there been any renewal of pressure, and there are moments when the difference between proposing oneself and surrendering as a prize to one of several eagerly competing hostesses seems too crushing to be contemplated. My own people were at Aix for my father's gout; to join them was a *pisaller* whose banality was repellent. Besides, they would be leaving soon for our home in Yorkshire, and I was not a

prophet in my own country. In short, I was at the extremity of depression.

The usual preliminary scuffle on the staircase prepared me for the knock and entry of Withers. (One of the things which had for some time ceased to amuse me was the laxity of manners, proper to the season, among the servants of the big block of chambers where I lived.) Withers demurely handed me a letter bearing a German post-mark and marked "Urgent." I had just finished dressing, and was collecting my money and gloves. A momentary thrill of curiosity broke in upon my depression as I sat down to open it. A corner on the reverse of the envelope bore the blotted legend: "Very sorry, but there's one other thing—a pair of rigging screws from Carey and Neilson's, size 1⅜, *galvanised.*" Here it is :—

Yacht "Dulcibella,"
Flensburg, Schleswig-Holstein, Sept. 21st.

DEAR CARRUTHERS, — I daresay you'll be surprised at hearing from me, as it's ages since we met. It is more than likely, too, that what I'm going to suggest won't suit you, for I know nothing of your plans, and if you're in town at all you're probably just getting into harness again and can't get away. So I merely write on the offchance to ask if you would care to come out here and join me in a little yachting, and, I hope, duck shooting. I know you're keen on shooting, and I sort of remember that you have done some yachting too, though I rather forget about that. This part of the Baltic—the Schleswig fiords—is a splendid cruising-ground — A1 scenery — and there ought to be plenty of duck about soon, if it gets cold enough. I came out here *via* Holland and the Frisian Islands, starting early in August. My pals have had to leave me, and I'm badly in want of another, as I don't want to lay up yet for a bit. I needn't say how glad I should be if you could come. If you can, send me a wire to the P.O. here. Flushing and on by Hamburg will be your best route, I think. I'm having a few repairs done here, and will have them ready sharp by the time your train arrives. Bring your gun and a good lot of No. 4's ; and would you mind calling at Lancaster's and asking for mine, and bringing it too ? Bring some oilskins. Better get the eleven-shilling sort, jacket and trousers—not the "yachting" brand ; and if you paint bring your gear. I know you speak German like a native, and that will be a great help. Forgive this hail of directions, but I've a sort of feeling that I'm in luck and that you'll come. Anyway, I hope you and the F.O. both flourish. Good-bye.—Yours ever,

ARTHUR H. DAVIES.

Would you mind bringing me out a *prismatic compass*, and a pound of Raven mixture ?

This letter marked an epoch for me ; but I little suspected the fact as I crumpled it into my pocket and started languidly on the *voie douloureuse* which I nightly followed to the club. In Pall Mall there were no dignified greetings to be exchanged now with well-groomed acquaintances. The only people to be seen were some late stragglers from the park, with a perambulator and some hot and dusty children lagging fretfully behind ; some rustic sightseers draining the last dregs of the daylight in an effort to make out from their guide-books which of these reverend piles was which ; a policeman, and a builder's cart. Of course the club was a strange one, both of my own being closed for cleaning, a coincidence expressly planned by Providence for my inconvenience. The club which you are "permitted to make use of" on these occasions always irritates with its strangeness and discomfort. The few occupants seem odd and oddly dressed, and you wonder how they got there. The particular weekly that you want is not taken in ; the dinner is execrable, and the ventilation a farce. All these evils oppressed me to-night. And yet I was puzzled to find that somewhere within me there was a faint lightening of the spirits ; causeless, as far as I could discover. It could not be Davies's letter. Yachting in the Baltic at the end of September ! The very idea made one shudder. Cowes, with a pleasant party and hotels handy, was all very well. An August cruise on a steam yacht in French waters or the Highlands was all very well ; but what kind of a yacht was this ? It must be of a certain size to have got so far, but I thought I remembered enough of Davies's means to know that he had no money to waste on luxuries. That brought me to the man himself. I had known him at Oxford—not as one of my immediate set ; but we were a sociable college, and I had seen a good deal of him, liking him for his physical energy combined with a certain simplicity and modesty, though, indeed, he had nothing to be conceited about ; liked him, in fact, in the way that at that receptive period one likes many men

whom one never keeps up with later. We had both gone down in the same year—three years ago now. I had gone to France and Germany for two years to learn the languages; he had failed for the Indian Civil, and then had gone into a solicitor's office. I had only seen him since at rare intervals, though I admitted to myself that for his part he had clung loyally to what ties of friendship there were between us. But the truth was that we had drifted apart from the nature of things. I had passed brilliantly into my profession, and on the few occasions I had met him since I made my triumphant *début* in society I had found nothing left in common between us. He seemed to know none of my friends, he dressed indifferently, and I thought him dull. I had always connected him with boats and the sea, but never with yachting, in the sense that I understood it. In college days he had nearly persuaded me into sharing a squalid week in some open boat he had picked up, and was going to sail among some dreary mud-flats somewhere on the east coast. There was nothing else, and the funereal function of dinner drifted on. But I found myself remembering at the *entrée* that I had recently heard, at second or third hand, of something else about him—exactly what I could not recall. When I reached the savoury, I had concluded, so far as I had centred my mind on it at all, that the whole thing was a culminating irony, as, indeed, was the savoury in its way. After the wreck of my pleasant plans and the fiasco of my martyrdom, to be asked as consolation to spend October freezing in the Baltic with an eccentric nonentity who bored me! Yet, as I smoked my cigar in the ghastly splendour of the empty smoking-room, the subject came up again. Was there anything in it? There were certainly no alternatives at hand. And to bury myself in the Baltic at this unearthly time of year had at least a smack of tragic thoroughness about it.

I pulled out the letter again, and ran down its impulsive staccato sentences, affecting to ignore what a gust of fresh air, high spirits, and good fellowship this flimsy bit of paper wafted into the jaded club-room. On reperusal, it was full of evil presage—"A 1 scenery"—but what of equinoctial storms and October fogs? Every sane yachtsman was paying off his crew now. "There ought to be duck"—vague, very vague. "If it gets cold enough" . . . cold and yachting seemed to be a gratuitously monstrous union. His pals had left him; why? "Not the 'yachting' brand"; and why not? As to the size, comfort, and crew of the yacht—all cheerfully ignored; so many maddening blanks. And, by the way, why in Heaven's name "a prismatic compass"? I fingered a few magazines, played a game of fifty with a friendly old fogey, too importunate to be worth the labour of resisting, and went back to my chambers to bed, ignorant that a friendly Providence had come to my rescue; and, indeed, rather resenting any clumsy attempt at such friendliness.

CHAPTER TWO

THE "DULCIBELLA"

THAT two days later I should be found pacing the deck of the Flushing steamer with a ticket for Hamburg in my pocket may seem a strange result, yet not so strange if you have divined my state of mind. You will guess, at any rate, that I was armed with the conviction that I was doing an act of obscure penance, rumours of which might call attention to my lot and perhaps awaken remorse in the right quarter, while it left me free to enjoy myself unobtrusively in the remote event of enjoyment being possible.

The fact was that, at breakfast on the morning after the arrival of the letter, I had still found that inexplicable lightening which I mentioned before, and strong enough to warrant a revival of the pros and cons. An important pro which I had not thought of before was that after all it was a

good-natured piece of unselfishness to join Davies; for he had spoken of the want of a pal, and seemed honestly to be in need of me. I almost clutched at this consideration. It was an admirable excuse, when I reached my office that day, for a resigned study of the Continental Bradshaw, and an order to Carter to unroll a great creeking wall-map of Germany and find me Flensburg. The latter labour I might have saved him, but it was good for Carter to have something to do; and his patient ignorance was amusing. With most of the map and what it suggested I was tolerably familiar, for I had not wasted my year in Germany, whatever I had done or not done since. Its people, history, progress, and future had interested me intensely, and I had still friends in Dresden and Berlin. Flensburg recalled the Danish war of '64, and by the time Carter's researches had ended in success I had forgotten the task set him, and was wondering whether the prospect of seeing something of that lovely region of Schleswig-Holstein,* as I knew from hearsay that it was, was at all to be set against such an uncomfortable way of seeing it, with the season so late, the company so unattractive, and all the other drawbacks which I counted and treasured as proofs of my desperate condition, if I *were* to go. It needed little to decide me, and I think K—'s arrival from Switzerland, offensively sunburnt, was the finishing touch. His greeting was "Hullo, Carruthers, you here? Thought you had got away long ago. Lucky devil, though, to be going now, just in time for the best driving and the early pheasants. The heat's been shocking out there. Carter, bring me a Bradshaw"—(an extraordinary book, Bradshaw, turned to from habit, even when least wanted, as men fondle guns and rods in the close season).

By lunch-time the weight of indecision had been removed, and I found myself entrusting Carter with a telegram to Davies, P.O., Flensburg. "Thanks; expect me 9.34 p.m. 26th"; which produced, three hours later, a reply: "Delighted; please bring a No. 3 Rippingille stove"—a perplexing and ominous direction, which somehow chilled me in spite of its subject matter.

Indeed, my resolution was continually faltering. It faltered when I turned out my gun in the evening and thought of the grouse it ought to have accounted for. It faltered again when I contemplated the miscellaneous list of commissions, sown broadcast through Davies's letter, to fulfil which seemed to make me a willing tool where my chosen *rôle* was that of an embittered exile, or at least a condescending ally. However, I faced the commissions manfully, after leaving the office.

At Lancaster's I inquired for his gun, was received coolly, and had to pay a heavy bill, which it seemed to have incurred, before it was handed over. Having ordered the gun and No. 4's to be sent to my chambers, I bought the Raven mixture with that peculiar sense of injury which the prospect of smuggling in another's behalf always entails; and wondered where in the world Carey and Neilson's was, a firm which Davies spoke of as though it were as well known as the Bank of England or the Stores, instead of specialising in "rigging-screws," whatever they might be. They sounded important, though, and it would be only politic to unearth them. I connected them with the "few repairs," and awoke new misgivings. At the Stores I asked for a No. 3 Rippingille stove, and was confronted with a formidable and hideous piece of ironmongery, which burned petroleum in two capacious tanks, horribly prophetic of a smell of warm oil. I paid for this miserably, convinced of its grim efficiency, but speculating as to the domestic conditions which caused it to be sent for as an afterthought by telegram. I also asked about rigging-screws in the yachting department, but learnt that they were not kept in stock; that Carey and Neilson's would certainly have them, and that their shop was in the Minories, in the far east, meaning a journey nearly as long as to Flensburg, and twice as tiresome. They would be shut by the time I got there, so after this exhausting round of duty I went home

* See Map A.

in a cab, omitted dressing for dinner (an epoch in itself), ordered a chop up from the basement kitchen, and spent the rest of the evening packing and writing, with the methodical gloom of a man setting his affairs in order for the last time.

The last of those airless nights passed. The astonished Withers saw me breakfasting at eight, and at 9.30 I was vacantly examining rigging-screws with what wits were left me after a sulphurous ride in the Underground to Aldgate. I laid great stress on the ⅜'s, and the galvanism, and took them in trust, ignorant as to their functions. For the eleven-shilling oilskins I was referred to a villainous den in a back street, which the shopman said they always recommended, and where a dirty and bejewelled Hebrew chaffered with me (beginning at 18*s.*) over two reeking orange slabs distantly resembling moieties of the human figure. Their odour made me close prematurely for 14*s.*, and I hurried back (for I was due there at eleven) to my office with my two disreputable brown-paper parcels, one of which made itself so noticeable in the close official air that Carter attentively asked if I would like to have it sent to my chambers, and K— was inquisitive to bluntness about it and my movements. But I did not care to enlighten K—, whose comments I knew would be provokingly envious or wounding to my pride in some way.

I remembered, later on, the prismatic compass, and wired to the Minories to have one sent at once, feeling rather relieved that I was not present there to be cross-examined as to size and make. The reply was, "Not stocked; try surveying-instrument maker"—a reply both puzzling and reassuring, for Davies's request for a compass had given me more uneasiness than anything, while, to find that what he wanted turned out to be a surveying-instrument, was a no less perplexing discovery. That day I made my last *précis* and handed over my schedules—Procrustean beds, where unwilling facts were stretched and tortured—and said good-bye to my temporary chief, genial and lenient M—, who wished me a jolly holiday with all sincerity.

At seven I was watching a cab packed with my personal luggage and the collection of unwieldy and incongruous packages that my shopping had drawn down on me. Two deviations after that wretched prismatic compass—which I obtained in the end second-hand, *faute de mieux*, near Victoria, at one of those showy shops which look like jewellers' and are really pawnbrokers'—nearly caused me to miss my train. But at 8.30 I had shaken off the dust of London from my feet, and at 10.30 I was, as I have announced, pacing the deck of a Flushing steamer, adrift on this fatuous holiday in the far Baltic.

An air from the west, cooled by a midday thunderstorm, followed the steamer as she slid through the calm channels of the Thames estuary, passed the cordon of scintillating lightships that watch over the sea-roads to the imperial city like pickets round a sleeping army, and slipped out into the dark spaces of the North Sea. Stars were bright, summer scents from the Kent cliffs mingled coyly with vulgar steamer-smells; the summer weather held immutably. Nature, for her part, seemed resolved to be no party to my penance, but to be imperturbably bent on shedding mild ridicule over my wrongs. An irresistible sense of peace and detachment, combined with that delicious physical awakening that pulses through the nerve-sick townsman when city airs and bald routine are left behind him, combined to provide me, however thankless a subject, with a solid background of resignation. Stowing this safely away, I could calculate my intentions with cold egotism. If the weather held I might pass a not intolerable fortnight with Davies. When it broke up, as it was sure to, I could easily excuse myself from the pursuit of the problematical ducks; the wintry logic of facts would, in any case, decide him to lay up his yacht, for he could scarcely think of sailing home at such a season. I could then take a chance lying ready of spending a few weeks in Dresden or elsewhere. I settled this programme comfortably and then turned in.

From Flushing eastward to Ham

burg, then northward to Flensburg, I cut short the next day's sultry story. Past dyke and windmill and still canals, on to blazing stubbles and roaring towns; at the last, after dusk, through a quiet level region where the train pottered from one lazy little station to another, and at ten o'clock I found myself, stiff and stuffy, on the platform at Flensburg, exchanging greetings with Davies.

"It's awfully good of you to come."

"Not at all; it's very good of you to ask me."

We were both of us ill at ease. Even in the dim gaslight he clashed on my notions of a yachtsman—no cool white ducks or neat blue serge; and where was the snowy crowned yachting cap, that precious charm that so easily converts a landsman into a dashing mariner? Conscious that this impressive uniform, in high perfection, was lying ready in my portmanteau, I felt oddly guilty. He wore an old Norfolk jacket, muddy brown shoes, grey flannel trousers (or had they been white?), and an ordinary tweed cap. The hand he gave me was horny, and appeared to be stained with paint; the other one, which carried a parcel, had a bandage on it which would have borne renewal. There was an instant of mutual inspection. I thought he gave me a shy, hurried scrutiny as though to test past conjectures, with something of anxiety in it, and perhaps (save the mark!) a tinge of admiration. The face was familiar, and yet not familiar; the pleasant blue eyes, open, clean-cut features, unintellectual forehead were the same; so were the brisk and impulsive movements; there was some change; but the moment of awkward hesitation was over and the light was bad; and, while strolling down the platform for my luggage, we chatted with constraint about trivial things.

"By the way," he suddenly said, laughing, "I'm afraid I'm not fit to be seen; but it's so late it doesn't matter. I've been painting hard all day, and just got it finished. I only hope we shall have some wind to-morrow—it's been hopelessly calm lately. I say, you've brought a good deal of stuff," he concluded, as my belongings began to collect.

Here was a reward for my submissive exertions in the far east!

"You gave me a good many commissions!"

"Oh, I didn't mean those things," he said, absently. "Thanks for bringing them, by the way. That's the stove, I suppose; cartridges this one, by the weight. You got the rigging-screws all right, I hope? They're not really necessary, of course" (I nodded vacantly, and felt a little hurt); "but they're simpler than lanyards, and you can't get them here. It's that portmanteau," he said, slowly, measuring it with a doubtful eye. "Never mind! we'll try. You couldn't do with the Gladstone only, I suppose? You see, the dinghy—h'm, and there's the hatchway, too"—he was lost in thought. "Anyhow, we'll try. I'm afraid there are no cabs; but it's quite near, and the porter'll help."

Sickening forebodings crept over me, while Davies shouldered my Gladstone and clutched at the parcels.

"Aren't your men here?" I asked, faintly.

"Men?" He looked confused. "Oh, perhaps I ought to have told you, I never have any paid hands; it's quite a small boat, you know—I hope you didn't expect luxury. I've managed her single-handed for some time. A man would be no use, and a horrible nuisance." He revealed these appalling truths with a cheerful assurance, which did nothing to hide a naïve apprehension of their effect on me. There was a check in our mobilisation.

"It's rather late to go on board, isn't it?" I said, in a wooden voice. Someone was turning out the gaslights, and the porter yawned ostentatiously. "I think I'd rather sleep at an hotel to-night." A strained pause.

"Oh, of course you can do that, if you like," said Davies, in transparent distress of mind. "But it seems hardly worth while to cart this stuff all the way to an hotel (I believe they're all on the other side of the harbour), and back again to the boat to-morrow. She's quite comfortable, and you're sure to sleep well, as you're tired."

"We can leave the things here," I argued, feebly, "and walk over with my bag."

"Oh, I shall have to go aboard anyhow," he rejoined; "I *never* sleep on shore."

He seemed to be clinging timidly, but desperately, to some diplomatic end. A stony despair was invading me and paralysing resistance. Better face the worst and be done with it.

"Come on," I said, grimly.

Heavily loaded, we stumbled over railway lines and rubble heaps, and came on the harbour. Davies led the way to a stairway, whose weedy steps disappeared below in gloom.

"If you'll get into the dinghy," he said, all briskness now, "I'll pass the things down."

I descended gingerly, holding as a guide a sodden painter which ended in a small boat, and conscious that I was collecting slime on cuffs and trousers.

"Hold up!" shouted Davies, cheerfully, as I sat down suddenly near the bottom, with one foot in the water.

I climbed wretchedly into the dinghy and awaited events.

"Now float her up close under the quay wall, and make fast to the ring down there," came down from above, followed by the slack of the sodden painter, which knocked my cap off as it fell. "All fast? Any knot'll do," I heard, as I grappled with this loathsome task, and then a big, dark object loomed overhead and was lowered into the dinghy. It was my portmanteau, and, placed athwart, exactly filled all the space amidships. "Does it fit?" was the anxious inquiry from aloft.

"Beautifully."

"Capital!"

Scratching at the greasy wall to keep the dinghy close to it, I received in succession our stores, and stowed the cargo as best I could, while the dinghy sank lower and lower in the water, and its precarious superstructure grew higher.

"Catch!" was the final direction from above, and a damp soft parcel hit me in the chest. "Be careful of that, it's meat. Now back to the stairs!"

I painfully acquiesced, and Davies appeared.

"It's a bit of a load, and she's rather deep; but I *think* we shall manage," he reflected. "You sit right aft, and I'll row."

I was too far gone for curiosity as to how this monstrous pyramid was to be rowed, or even for surmises as to its foundering by the way. I crawled to my appointed seat, and Davies extricated the buried sculls by a series of tugs, which shook the whole structure, and made us roll alarmingly. How he stowed himself into rowing posture I have not the least idea, but eventually we were moving sluggishly out into the open water, his head just visible in the bows. We had started from what appeared to be the head of a narrow loch, and were leaving behind us the lights of a big town. A long frontage of lamp-lit quays was on our left, with here and there the vague hull of a steamer alongside. We passed the last of the lights and came out into a broader stretch of water, when a light breeze was blowing and dark hills could be seen on either shore.

"I'm lying a little way down the fiord, you see," said Davies. "I hate to be too near a town, and I found a carpenter handy here—— There she is! I wonder how you'll like her!"

I roused myself. We were entering a little cove encircled by trees, and approaching a light which flickered in the rigging of a small vessel, whose outline gradually defined itself.

"Keep her off," said Davies, as we drew alongside.

In a moment he had jumped on deck, tied the painter, and was round at my end.

"You hand them up," he ordered, "and I'll take them."

It was a laborious task, with the one relief that it was not far to hand them—a doubtful compensation, for other reasons distantly shaping themselves. When the stack was transferred to the deck I followed it, tripping over the flabby meat parcel, which was already showing ghastly signs of disintegration under the dew. Hazily there floated through my mind my last embarkation on a yacht; my faultless attire, the trim gig and obsequious sailors, the accommodation ladder flashing with

varnish and brass in the August sun; the orderly, snowy decks and basket chairs under the awning aft. What a contrast with this sordid, midnight scramble, over damp meat and littered packing-cases! The bitterest touch of all was a growing sense of inferiority and ignorance, which I had never before been allowed to feel in my experience of yachts.

Davies awoke from another reverie over my portmanteau to say, cheerily: "I'll just show you round down below first, and then we'll stow things away and get to bed."

He dived down a companion ladder, and I followed cautiously. A complex odour of paraffin, past cookery, tobacco, and tar saluted my nostrils.

"Mind your head," said Davies, striking a match and lighting a candle, while I groped into the cabin. "You'd better sit down; it's easier to look round."

There might well have been sarcasm in this piece of advice, for I must have cut a ridiculous figure, peering awkwardly and suspiciously round, with shoulders and head bent to avoid the ceiling, which seemed in the half-light to be even nearer the floor than it was.

"You see," were Davies's reassuring words, "there's plenty of room to *sit* upright" (which was strictly true; but I am not very tall, and he is short). "Some people make a point of head-room, but I never mind much about it. That's the centre-board case," he explained, as, in stretching my legs out, my knee came into contact with a sharp edge.

I had not seen this devilish obstruction, as it was hidden beneath the table, which indeed rested on it at one end. It appeared to be a long, low triangle, running lengthways with the boat and dividing the naturally limited space into two.

"You see, she's a flat-bottomed boat, drawing very little water without the plate; that's why there's so little head-room. For deep water you lower the plate; so, in one way or another, you can go practically anywhere."

I was not nautical enough to draw any very definite conclusions from this, but what I did draw were not promising. The latter sentences were spoken from the forecastle, whither Davies had crept through a low sliding door, like that of a rabbit-hutch, and was already busy with a kettle over a stove which I made out to be a battered and disreputable twin brother of the No. 3 Rippingille.

"It'll be boiling soon," he remarked, "and we'll have some grog."

My eyes were used to the light now, and I took in the rest of my surroundings, which may be very simply described. Two long cushion-covered seats flanked the cabin, bounded at the after end by cupboards, one of which was cut low to form a sort of miniature sideboard, with glasses hung in a rack above it. The deck overhead was very low at each side but rose shoulder high for a space in the middle, where a "coach-house roof," with a skylight gave additional cabin space. Just outside the door was a fold-up washing-stand. On either wall were long net-racks holding a medley of flags, charts, caps, cigar-boxes, hanks of yarn, and such like. Across the forward bulkhead was a bookshelf crammed to overflowing with volumes of all sizes, many upside down and some coverless. Below this were a pipe-rack, an aneroid, and a clock with a hearty tick. All the woodwork was painted white, and to a less jaundiced eye than mine the interior might have had an enticing look of snugness. Some Kodak prints were nailed roughly on the after bulkhead, and just over the doorway was the photograph of a young girl.

"That's my sister," said Davies, who had emerged and saw me looking at it. "Now, let's get the stuff down." He ran up the ladder, and soon my portmanteau blackened the hatchway, and a great straining and squeezing began. "I was afraid it was too big," came down; "I'm sorry, but you'll have to unpack on deck—we may be able to squash it down when it's empty."

Then the wearisome tail of packages began to form a fresh stack in the cramped space at my feet, and my back ached with stooping and moiling in unfamiliar places. Davies came down, and with unconcealed pride introduced me to the sleeping cabin (he called

the other one "the saloon"). Another candle was lit and showed two short and narrow berths with blankets, but no sign of sheets; beneath these were drawers, one set of which Davies made me the master of, evidently thinking them a princely allowance of space for my wardrobe.

"You can chuck your things down the skylight on to your berth as you unpack them," he remarked. "By the way, I doubt if there's room for all you've got. I suppose you couldn't manage——"

"No, I couldn't," I said, shortly.

The absurdity of argument struck me; two men, doubled up like monkeys, cannot argue.

"If you'll go out I shall be able to get out too," I added. He seemed miserable at this ghost of an altercation, but I pushed past, mounted the ladder, and in the expiring moonlight unstrapped that accursed portmanteau, and, brimming over with irritation, groped among its contents, sorting some into the skylight with the same feeling that nothing mattered much now, and it was best to be done with it; repacking the rest with guilty stealth ere Davies should discover their character, and strapping up the whole again. Then I sat down upon my white elephant and shivered, for the chill of autumn was in the air. It suddenly struck me that if it had been raining things might have been worse still. The notion made me look round. The little cove was still as glass; stars above and stars below; a few white cottages glimmering at one point on the shore; in the west the lights of Flensburg; to the east the fiord broadening into unknown gloom. From Davies toiling below there were muffled sounds of wrenching, pushing, and hammering, punctuated occasionally by a heavy splash as something shot up from the hatchway and fell into the water.

How it came about I do not know. Whether it was something pathetic in the look I had last seen on his face—a look which I associated for no reason whatever with his bandaged hand; whether it was one of those instants of clear vision in which our separate selves are seen divided, the baser from the better, and I saw my silly egotism in contrast with a simple generous nature; whether it was an impalpable air of mystery which pervaded the whole enterprise and refused to be dissipated by its most mortifying and vulgarising incidents—a mystery dimly connected with my companion's obvious consciousness of having misled me into joining him; whether it was only the stars and the cool air rousing atrophied instincts of youth and spirits; probably, indeed, it was all these influences, cemented into strength by a ruthless sense of humour which whispered that I was in danger of making a mere commonplace fool of myself in spite of all my laboured calculations; but whatever it was, in a flash my mood changed. The crown of martyrdom disappeared, the wounded vanity healed; that precious fund of fictitious resignation drained away, but left no void. There was left a fashionable and dishevelled young man sitting in the dew and in the dark on a ridiculous portmanteau which dwarfed the yacht that was to carry it; a youth acutely sensible of ignorance in a strange and strenuous atmosphere; still feeling sore and victimised; but withal sanely ashamed and sanely resolved to enjoy himself. I anticipate; for though the change was radical its full growth was slow. But in any case it was here and now that it took its birth.

"Grog's ready!" came from below. Bunching myself for the descent I found to my astonishment that all trace of litter had miraculously vanished, and a cosy neatness reigned. Glasses and lemons were on the table, and a fragrant smell of punch had deadened previous odours. I showed little emotion at these amenities, but enough to give intense relief to Davies, who delightedly showed me his devices for storage, praising the "roominess" of his floating den. "There's your stove, you see," he ended; "I've chucked the old one overboard." It was a weakness of his, I should say here, to rejoice in throwing things overboard on the flimsiest pretexts. I afterwards suspected that the new stove had not been "really necessary" any more than the rigging-screws, but

was an excuse for gratifying this curious taste.

We smoked and chatted for a little, and then came the problem of going to bed. After much bumping of knuckles and head, and many giddy writhings, I mastered it, and lay between the rough blankets. Davies, moving swiftly and deftly, was soon in his.

"It's quite comfortable, isn't it?" he said, as he blew out the light from where he lay, with an accuracy which must have been the fruit of long practice.

I felt prickly all over, and there was a damp patch on the pillow, which was soon explained by a heavy drop of moisture falling on my forehead.

"I suppose the deck's not leaking?" I said, as mildly as I could.

"I'm awfully sorry," said Davies, earnestly, tumbling out of his bunk. "It must be the heavy dew. I did a lot of caulking yesterday, but I suppose I missed that place. I'll run up and square it with an oilskin."

"What's wrong with your hand?" I asked, sleepily, on his return, for gratitude reminded me of that bandage.

"Nothing much; I strained it the other day," was the reply; and then the seemingly inconsequent remark: "I'm glad you brought that prismatic compass. It's not really necessary, of course; but" (muffled by blankets) "it may come in useful."

CHAPTER THREE

DAVIES

I DOZED but fitfully, with a fretful sense of sore elbows and neck and many a draughty hiatus among the blankets. It was broad daylight before I had reached the stage of torpor in which such slumber merges. That was finally broken by the descent through the skylight of a torrent of water. I started up, bumped my head hard against the decks, and blinked leaden-eyed upwards.

"Sorry! I'm scrubbing decks. Come up and bathe. Slept well?" I heard a voice saying from aloft.

"Fairly well," I growled, stepping out into a pool of water on the oilcloth. Thence I stumbled up the ladder, dived overboard, and buried bad dreams, stiffness, frowsiness, and tormented nerves in the loveliest fiord of the lovely Baltic. A short and furious swim and I was back again, searching for a means of ascent up the smooth black side, which, low as it was, was slippery and unsympathetic. Davies, in a loose canvas shirt, with the sleeves tucked up, and flannels rolled up to the knee, hung over me with a rope's end, and chatted unconcernedly about the easiness of the job when you know how, adjuring me to mind the paint, and talking about an accommodation ladder he had once had, but had thrown overboard because it was so horribly in the way. When I arrived, my knees and elbows were picked out in black paint, to his consternation. Nevertheless, as I plied the towel, I knew that I had left in those limpid depths yet another crust of discontent and self-conceit.

As I dressed into flannels and blazer, I looked round the deck, and with an unskilled and doubtful eye took in all that the darkness had hitherto hidden. She seemed very small (in point of fact she was seven tons), something over thirty feet in length and nine in beam, a size very suitable to week-ends in the Solent, for such as liked that sort of thing; but that she should have come from Dover to the Baltic suggested a world of physical endeavour of which I had never dreamed. I passed to the æsthetic side. Smartness and beauty were essential to yachts, in my mind, but with the best resolves to be pleased I found little encouragement here. The hull seemed too low, and the mainmast too high; the cabin roof looked clumsy, and the skylights saddened the eye with dull iron and plebian graining. What brass there was, on the tiller-head and elsewhere, was tarnished with sickly green. The decks had none of that creamy purity which Cowes expects, but were rough and grey, and showed tarry exhalations round the

seams and rusty stains near the bows. The ropes and rigging were in mourning when contrasted with the delicate buff manilla so satisfying to the artistic eye as seen against the blue of a June sky at Southsea. Nor was the whole effect bettered by many signs of recent refitting. An impression of paint, varnish, and carpentry were in the air; a gaudy new burgee fluttered aloft; there seemed to be a new rope or two, especially round the diminutive mizzen-mast, which itself looked altogether new. But all this only emphasised the general plainness, reminding one of a respectable woman of the working-classes trying to dress above her station, and soon likely to give it up.

That the *ensemble* was businesslike and solid even my untrained eye could see. Many of the deck fittings seemed disproportionately substantial. The anchor-chain looked contemptuous of its charge; the binnacle with its compass was of a size and prominence almost comically impressive, and was, moreover, the only piece of brass which was burnished and showed traces of reverent care. Two huge coils of stout and dingy warp lay just abaft the main-mast, and summed up the weather-beaten aspect of the little ship. I should add here that in the distant past she had been a lifeboat, and had been clumsily converted into a yacht by the addition of a counter, deck, and the necessary spars. She was built, as all lifeboats are, diagonally, of two skins of teak, and thus had immense strength, though, in the matter of looks, all a hybrid's failings.

Hunger and "Tea's made!" from below brought me down to the cabin, where I found breakfast laid out on the table over the centre-board case, with Davies earnestly presiding, rather flushed as to the face, and sooty as to the fingers. There was a slight shortage of plate and crockery, but I praised the bacon and could do so truthfully, for its crisp and steaming shavings would have put to shame the efforts of my London cook. Indeed, I should have enjoyed the meal heartily were it not for the lowness of the sofa and table, causing a curvature of the body which made swallowing a more lengthy process than usual, and induced a periodical yearning to get up and stretch—a relief which spelt disaster to the skull. I noticed, too, that Davies spoke with a zest, sinister to me, of the delights of white bread and fresh milk, which he seemed to consider unusual luxuries, though suitable to an inaugural banquet in honour of a fastidious stranger. "One can't be always going on shore," he said, when I showed a discreet interest in these things. "I lived for ten days on a big rye loaf over in the Frisian Islands."

"And it died hard, I suppose?"

"Very hard, but" (gravely) "quite good. After that I taught myself to make rolls; had no baking powder at first, so used Eno's fruit salt, but they wouldn't rise much with that. As for milk, condensed is—I hope you don't mind it?"

I changed the subject, and asked about his plans.

"Let's get under way at once," he said, "and sail down the fiord." I tried for something more specific, but he was gone, and his voice drowned in the fo'c'sle by the clatter and swish of washing up. Thenceforward events moved with bewildering rapidity. Humbly desirous of being useful I joined him on deck, only to find that he scarcely noticed me, save as a new and unexpected obstacle in his round of activity. He was everywhere at once—heaving in chain, hooking on halyards, hauling ropes; while my part became that of the clown who does things after they are already done, for my knowledge of a yacht was of that floating and inaccurate kind which is useless in practice. Soon the anchor was up (a great rusty monster it was!), the sails set, and Davies was darting swiftly to and fro between the tiller and jib-sheets, while the *Dulcibella* bowed a lingering farewell to the shore and headed for the open fiord. Erratic puffs from the high land behind made her progress timorous at first, but soon the fair-way was reached and a true breeze from Flensburg and the west took her in its friendly grip. Steadily she rustled down the calm blue highway whose soft beauty was the introduction to a passage in my life, short, but

pregnant with moulding force, through stress and strain, for me and others.

Davies was gradually resuming his natural self, with abstracted intervals, in which he lashed the helm to finger a distant rope, with such speed that the movements seemed simultaneous. Once he vanished, only to reappear in an instant with a chart, which he studied, while steering, with a success that its reluctant folds seemed to render impossible. Waiting respectfully for his revival I had full time to look about. The fiord here was about a mile broad. From the shore we had left the hills rose steeply, but with no rugged grandeur; the outlines were soft; there were green spaces and rich woods on the lower slopes; a little white town was opening up in one place, and scattered farms dotted the prospect. The other shore, which I could just see, framed between the gunwale and the mainsail, as I sat leaning against the hatchway and sadly missing a deck-chair, was lower and lonelier, though prosperous and pleasing to the eye. Spacious pastures led up by slow degrees to ordered clusters of wood, which hinted at the presence of some great manor house. Behind us, Flensburg was settling into haze. Ahead, the scene was shut in by the contours of hills, some clear, some dreamy and distant. Lastly, a single glimpse of water shining between the folds of hill far away hinted at spaces of distant sea of which this was but a secluded inlet. Everywhere was that peculiar charm engendered by the association of quiet pastoral country and a homely human atmosphere with a branch of the great ocean that bathes all the shores of our globe.

There was another charm in the scene, due to the way in which I was viewing it—not as a pampered passenger on a "fine steam yacht," or even on "a powerful modern schooner," as the yacht agents advertise, but from the deck of a scrubby little craft of doubtful build and distressing plainness, which yet had smelt her persistent way to this distant fiord through I knew not what of difficulty and danger, with no apparent motive in her single occupant, who talked as vaguely and unconcernedly about his adventurous cruise as though it were all a protracted afternoon on Southampton Water.

I glanced round at Davies. He had dropped the chart and was sitting, or rather half lying, on the deck with one bronzed arm over the tiller, gazing fixedly ahead, with just an occasional glance around and aloft. He still seemed absorbed in himself, and for a moment or two I studied his face with an attention I had never, since I had known him, given it. I had always thought it commonplace, as I had thought him commonplace, so far as I had thought at all about either. It had always rather irritated me by an excess of candour and boyishness. These qualities it had kept, but the scales were falling from my eyes, and I saw others. I saw strength to obstinacy, and courage to recklessness, in the firm lines of the chin; an older and deeper look in the eyes. Those odd transitions from bright mobility to detached earnestness, which had partly amused and chiefly annoyed me hitherto, seemed now to be lost in a sensitive reserve, not cold or egotistic, but strangely winning from its paradoxical frankness. Sincerity was stamped on every lineament. A deep misgiving stirred me that, clever as I thought myself, nicely perceptive of the right and congenial men to know, I had made some big mistakes—how many, I wondered? A relief, scarcely less deep because it was unconfessed, stole in on me with the suspicion that, little as I deserved it, the patient fates were offering me a golden chance of repairing at least one. And yet, I mused, the patient fates have crooked methods, besides a certain mischievous humour, for it was Davies who had asked me out—though now he scarcely seemed to need me—almost tricked me into coming out, for he might have known I was not suited to such a life; yet trickery and Davies sounded an odd conjuncture.

Probably it was the growing discomfort of my attitude which produced this backsliding. My night's rest and the "ascent from the bath" had, in fact, done little to prepare me for contact with sharp edges and hard surfaces.

But Davies had suddenly come to himself, and with an "I say, are you comfortable? Have something to sit on?" jerked the helm a little to windward, felt it like a pulse for a moment, with a rapid look to windward, and dived below, whence he returned with a couple of cushions, which he threw to me. I felt perversely resentful of these luxuries, and asked:—

"Can't I be of any use?"

"Oh, don't you bother," he answered. "I expect you're tired. Aren't we having a splendid sail? That must be Ekken on the port bow," peering under the sail, "where the trees run in. I say, do you mind looking at the chart?" He tossed it over to me. I spread it out painfully, for it curled up like a watch-spring at the least slackening of pressure. I was not familiar with charts, and this sudden trust reposed in me, after a good deal of neglect, made me nervous.

"You see Flensburg, don't you?" he said. "That's where we are," dabbing with a long reach at an indefinite space on the crowded sheet. "Now which side of that buoy off the point do we pass?"

I had scarcely taken in which was land and which was water, much less the significance of the buoy, when he resumed:—

"Never mind; I'm pretty sure it's all deep water about here. I expect that marks the fair-way for steamers."

In a minute or two we were passing the buoy in question, on the wrong side I am pretty certain, for weeds and sand came suddenly into view below us with uncomfortable distinctness. But all Davies said was:—

"There's never any sea here, and the plate's not down," a dark utterance which I pondered doubtfully. "The best of these Schleswig waters," he went on, "is that a boat of this size can go almost anywhere. There's no navigation required. Why——" At this moment a faint scraping was felt, rather than heard, beneath us.

"Aren't we aground?" I asked, with great calmness.

"Oh, she'll blow over," he replied, wincing a little.

She "blew over," but the episode caused a little naïve vexation in Davies. I relate it as a good instance of one of his minor peculiarities. He was utterly without that didactic pedantry which yachting has a fatal tendency to engender in men who profess it. He had tossed me the chart without a thought that I was an ignoramus, to whom it would be Greek, and who would provide him with an admirable subject to drill and lecture, just as his neglect of me throughout the morning had been merely habitual and unconscious independence. In the second place, master of his *métier*, as I knew him afterwards to be, resourceful, skilful, and alert, he was liable to lapse into a certain amateurish vagueness, half irritating and half amusing. I think truly that both these peculiarities came from the same source, a hatred of any sort of affectation. To the same source I traced the fact that he and his yacht observed none of the superficial etiquette of yachts and yachtsmen, that she never, for instance, flew a national ensign, and he never wore a "yachting suit."

We rounded a low green point which I had scarcely noticed before.

"We must jibe," said Davies; "just take the helm, will you?" and, without waiting for my co-operation, he began hauling in the mainsheet with great vigour. I had rude notions of steering, but jibing is a delicate operation. No yachtsman will be surprised to hear that the boom saw its opportunity and swung over with a mighty crash, with the mainsheet entangled round me and the tiller.

"Jibed all standing," was his sorrowful comment. "You're not used to her yet. She's very quick on the helm."

"Where am I to steer for?" I asked, wildly.

"Oh, don't trouble, I'll take her now," he replied.

I felt it was time to make my position clear. "I'm an utter duffer at sailing," I began. "You'll have a lot to teach me, or one of these days I shall be wrecking you. You see, there's always been a crew——"

"Crew!"—with sovereign contempt—"why, the whole fun of the thing is to do everything oneself."

"Well, I've felt in the way the whole morning."

"I'm awfully sorry!" His dismay and repentance were comical. "Why, it's just the other way; you may be all the use in the world." He became absent.

We were following the inward trend of a small bay towards a cleft in the low shore.

"That's Ekken Sound," said Davies; "let's look into it," and a minute or two later we were drifting through a dainty little strait, with a peep of open water at the end of it. Cottages bordered either side, some overhanging the very water, some connecting with it by a rickety wooden staircase or a miniature landing-stage. Creepers and roses rioted over the walls and tiny porches. For a space on one side, a rude quay, with small smacks floating off it, spoke of some minute commercial interests; a very small tea-garden, with neglected-looking bowers and leaf-strewn tables, hinted at some equally minute tripping interest. A pervading hue of mingled bronze and rose came partly from the weather-mellowed woodwork of the cottages and stages, and partly from the creepers and the trees behind, where autumn's subtle fingers were already at work. Down this exquisite sea-lane we glided till it ended in a broad mere, where our sails, which had been shivering and complaining, filled into contented silence.

"Ready about!" said Davies, callously. "We must get out of this again." And round we swung.

"Why not anchor and stop here?" I protested; for a view of tantalising loveliness was unfolding itself.

"Oh, we've seen all there is to be seen, and we must take this breeze while we've got it." It was always torture to Davies to feel a good breeze running to waste while he was inactive at anchor or on shore. The "shore" to him was an inferior element, merely serving as a useful annexe to the water—a source of necessary supplies.

"Let's have lunch," he pursued, as we resumed our way down the fiord. A vision of iced drinks, tempting salads, white napery, and an attentive steward mocked me with past recollections.

"You'll find a tongue," said the voice of doom, "in the starboard sofa-locker; beer under the floor in the bilge. I'll see her round that buoy, if you wouldn't mind beginning." I obeyed with a bad grace, but the close air and cramped posture must have benumbed my faculties, for I opened the port-side locker, reached down, and grasped a sticky body, which turned out to be a pot of varnish. Recoiling wretchedly, I tried the opposite one, combatting the embarrassing heel of the boat and the obstructive edges of the centre-board case. A medley of damp tins of varied sizes showed in the gloom, exuding a mouldy odour. Faded legends on dissolving paper, like the remnants of old posters on a disused hoarding, spoke of soups, curries, beefs, potted meats, and other hidden delicacies. I picked out a tongue, re-imprisoned the odour, and explored for beer. It was true, I supposed, that bilge didn't hurt it, as I tugged at the plank on my hands and knees, but I should have myself preferred a more accessible and less humid wine-cellar than the cavities among slimy ballast from which I dug the bottles. I regarded my hard-won and ill-favoured pledges of a meal with giddiness and discouragement.

"How are you getting on?" shouted Davies; "the tin-opener's hanging up on the bulkhead; the plates and knives are in the cupboard."

I doggedly pursued my functions. The plates and knives met me half-way, for, being on the weather side, and thus having a downward slant, its contents, when I slipped the latch, slid affectionately into my bosom, and overflowed with a clatter and jingle on to the floor.

"That often happens," I heard from above. "Never mind! There are no breakables. I'm coming down to help." And down he came, leaving the *Dulcibella* to her own devices.

"I think I'll go on deck," I said. "Why in the world couldn't you lunch comfortably at Ekken and save this infernal pandemonium of a picnic? Where's the yacht going to meanwhile? And how are we to lunch on that slanting table? I'm covered with

varnish and mud, and ankle-deep in crockery. There goes the beer!"

"You shouldn't have stood it on the table with this list on," said Davies, with intense composure, "but it won't do any harm; it'll drain into the bilge" (ashes to ashes, dust to dust, I thought). "You go on deck now, and I'll finish getting ready." I regretted my explosion, though wrung from me under great provocation.

"Keep her straight on as she's going," said Davies, as I clambered up out of the chaos, brushing the dust off my trousers and varnishing the ladder with my hands. I unlashed the helm and kept her as she was going.

We had rounded a sharp bend in the fiord, and were sailing up a broad and straight reach which every moment disclosed new beauties, sights fair enough to be balm to the angriest spirit. A red-roofed hamlet was on our left, on the right an ivied ruin, close to the water, where some contemplative cattle stood knee-deep. The view ahead was a white strand which fringed both shores, and to it fell wooded slopes, interrupted here and there by low sandstone cliffs of warm red colouring, and now and again by a dingle with cracks of greensward.

I forgot petty squalors and enjoyed things—the coy tremble of the tiller and the backwash of air from the dingy mainsail, and, with a somewhat chastened rapture, the lunch which Davies brought up to me and solicitously watched me eat.

Later, as the wind sank to lazy airs, he became busy with a larger topsail and jib; but I was content to doze away the afternoon, drenching brain and body in the sweet and novel foreign atmosphere, and dreamily watching the fringe of glen cliff and cool white sand as they passed ever more slowly by.

CHAPTER FOUR

RETROSPECT

"WAKE up!" I rubbed my eyes and wondered where I was; stretched myself painfully, too, for even the cushions had not given me a true bed of roses. It was dusk, and the yacht was stationary in glassy water, coloured by the last after-glow. A roofing of thin upper-cloud had spread over most of the sky, and a subtle smell of rain was in the air. We seemed to be in the middle of the fiord, whose shores looked distant and steep in the gathering darkness. Close ahead they faded away suddenly, and the sight lost itself in a grey void. The stillness was absolute.

"We can't get to Sonderburg to-night," said Davies.

"What's to be done then?" I asked, collecting my senses.

"Oh! we'll anchor anywhere here, we're just at the mouth of the fiord; I'll tow her inshore if you'll steer in that direction." He pointed vaguely at a blur of trees and cliff. Then he jumped into the dinghy, cast off the painter, and, after snatching at the slack of a rope, began towing the reluctant yacht by short jerks of the sculls. The menacing aspect of that grey void, combined with a natural preference for getting to some definite place at night, combined to depress my spirits afresh. In my sleep I had dreamt of Morven Lodge, of heather tea-parties after glorious slaughters of grouse, of salmon leaping in amber pools—and now—

"Just take a cast of the lead, will you?" came Davies's voice above the splash of the sculls.

"Where is it?" I shouted back.

"Never mind—we're close enough now; let—— Can you manage to let go the anchor?"

I hurried forward and picked impotently at the bonds of the sleeping monster. But Davies was aboard again, and stirred him with a deft touch or two, till he crashed into the water with a grinding of chain.

"We shall do well here," said he.

"Isn't this rather an open anchorage?" I suggested.

"It's only open from that quarter,"

he replied. "If it comes on to blow from there we shall have to clear out; but I think it's only rain. Let's stow the sails."

Another whirlwind of activity, in which I joined as effectively as I could, oppressed by the prospect of having to "clear out"—who knows whither?—at midnight. But Davies's *sang froid* was infectious, I suppose, and the little den below, bright-lit and soon fragrant with cookery, pleaded insistently for affection. Yachting in this singular style was hungry work, I found. Steak tastes none the worse for having been wrapped in newspaper, and the slight traces of the day's news disappear with frying in onions and potato-chips. Davies was indeed on his mettle for this, his first dinner to his guest; for he produced with stealthy pride, not from the dishonoured grave of the beer, but from some more hallowed recess, a bottle of German champagne, from which we drank success to the *Dulcibella*.

"I wish you would tell me all about your cruise from England," I asked. "You must have had some exciting adventures. Here are the charts; let's go over them."

"We must wash up first," he replied, and I was tactfully introduced to one of his very few "standing orders," that tobacco should not burn, nor post-prandial chat begin, until that distasteful process had ended. "It would never get done otherwise," he sagely opined. But when we were finally settled with cigars, a variety of which, culled from many ports—German, Dutch, and Belgian—Davies kept in a battered old box in the net-rack, the promised talk hung fire.

"I'm no good at description," he complained; "and there's really very little to tell. We left Dover—Morrison and I—on August 6th; made a good passage to Ostend."

"You had some fun there, I suppose?" I put in, thinking of—well, of Ostend in August.

"Fun! A filthy hole I call it; we had to stop a couple of days, as we fouled a buoy coming in and carried away the bobstay; we lay in a dirty little tidal dock, and there was nothing to do on shore."

"Well, what next?"

"We had a splendid sail to the East Scheldt, but then, like fools, decided to go through Holland by canal and river. It was good fun enough navigating the estuary—the tides and banks there are appalling—but further inland it was a wretched business, nothing but paying lock-dues, bumping against schuyts, and towing down stinking canals. Never a peaceful night like this—always moored by some quay or tow-path, with people passing and boys. Heavens! shall I ever forget those boys! A perfect murrain of them infests Holland; they seem to have nothing in the world to do but throw stones and mud at foreign yachts."

"They want a Herod, with some statesmanlike views on infanticide."

"By Jove! yes; but the fact is that you want a crew for that pottering inland work; they can smack the boys and keep an eye on the sculls. A boat like this should stick to the sea, or out-of-the-way places on the coast. Well, after Amsterdam."

"You've skipped a good deal, haven't you?" I interrupted.

"Oh! have I? Well, let me see, we went by Dordrecht to Rotterdam; nothing to see there, and swarms of tugs buzzing about and shaving one's bows every second. On by the Vecht river to Amsterdam, and thence—Lord, what a relief it was!—out into the North Sea again. The weather had been still and steamy; but it broke up finely now, and we had a rattling three-reef sail to the Zuyder Zee."

He reached up to the bookshelf for what looked like an ancient ledger, and turned over the leaves.

"Is that your log?" I asked. "I should like to have a look at it."

"Oh! you'd find it dull reading—if you could read it at all; it's just short notes about winds and bearings, and so on." He was turning some leaves over rapidly. "Now why don't *you* keep a log of what we do? I can't describe things, and you can."

"I've half a mind to try," I said.

"We want another chart now," and he pulled down a second yet more stained and frayed than the first. "We had a splendid time then

exploring the Zuyder Zee, its northern part at least, and round those islands which bound it on the north. Those are the Frisian Islands, and they stretch for 120 miles or so eastward. You see, the first two of them, Texel and Vlieland, shut in the Zuyder Zee, and the rest border the Dutch and German coasts." *

"What's all this?" I said, running my finger over some dotted patches which covered much of the chart. The latter was becoming unintelligible; clean-cut coasts and neat regiments of little figures had given place to a confusion of winding and intersecting lines and bald spaces.

"All *sand*," said Davies, enthusiastically. "You can't think what a splendid sailing-ground it is. You can explore for days without seeing a soul. These are the channels, you see; they're very badly charted. This chart was almost useless, but it made it all the more fun. No towns or harbours, just a village or two on the islands, if you wanted stores."

"They look rather desolate," I said.

"Desolate's no word for it; they're really only gigantic sandbanks themselves."

"Wasn't all this rather dangerous?" I asked.

"Not a bit; you see, that's where our shallow draught and flat bottom came in—we could go anywhere, and it didn't matter running aground—she's perfect for that sort of work; and she doesn't really *look* bad either, does she?" he asked, rather wistfully. I suppose I hesitated, for he said, abruptly:—

"Anyway, I don't go in for looks."

He had leaned back, and I detected traces of incipient absent-mindedness. His cigar, which he had lately been lighting and relighting feverishly—a habit of his when excited—seemed now to have expired for good.

"About running aground," I persisted; "surely that's apt to be dangerous?"

He sat up and felt round for a match.

"Not the least, if you know where you can run risks and where you can't; anyway, you can't possibly help it. That chart may look simple to you"—("simple!" I thought)—"but at half flood all those banks are covered; the islands and coasts are scarcely visible, they are so low, and everything looks the same." This graphic description of a "splendid cruising-ground" took away my breath. "Of course there *is* risk sometimes—choosing an anchorage requires care. You can generally get a nice berth under the lee of a bank, but the tides run strong in the channels, and if there's a gale blowing——"

"Didn't you ever take a pilot?" I interrupted.

"Pilot? Why, the whole point of the thing"—he stopped short—"I did take one once, later on," he resumed, with an odd smile, which faded at once.

"Well?" I urged, for I saw a reverie was coming.

"Oh! he ran me ashore, of course. Served me right. I wonder what the weather's doing"; he rose, glanced at the aneroid, the clock, and the half-closed skylight with a curious circular movement, and went a step or two up the companion-ladder, where he remained for several minutes with head and shoulders in the open air.

There was no sound of wind outside, but the *Dulcibella* had begun to move in her sleep, as it were, rolling drowsily to some faint send of the sea, with an occasional short jump, like the start of an uneasy dreamer.

"What does it look like?" I called from my sofa. I had to repeat the question.

"Rain coming," said Davies, returning, "and possibly wind; but we're safe enough here. It's coming from the sou'-west; shall we turn in?"

"We haven't finished your cruise yet," I said. "Light a pipe and tell me the rest."

"All right," he agreed, with more readiness than I expected.

"After Terschelling *—here it is, the third island from the west—I pottered along eastward."

"I?"

"Oh! I forgot. Morrison had to leave me there. I missed him badly, but I hoped at that time to get —— to

* See Map A.

* See Map A.

join me. I could manage all right single-handed, but for that sort of work two are much better than one. The plate's beastly heavy; in fact, I had to give up using it for fear of a smash."

"After Terschelling?" I jogged his memory.

"Well, I followed the Dutch islands, Ameland, Schiermonnikoog, Rottum (outlandish names, aren't they?), sometimes outside them, sometimes inside. It was a bit lonely, but grand sport and very interesting. The charts were shocking, but I worried out most of the channels."

"I suppose those waters are only used by small local craft?" I put in; "that would account for inaccuracies." Did Davies think that Admiralties had time to waste on smoothing the road for such quixotic little craft as his, in all its inquisitive ramblings? But he fired up.

"That's all very well," he said, "but think what folly it is. However, that's a long story, and will bore you. To cut matters short, for we ought to be turning in, I got to Borkum—that's the first of the *German* islands." He pointed at a round bare lozenge lying in the midst of a welter of sandbanks. "Rottum—this queer little one—it has only one house on it—is the most easterly Dutch island, and the mainland of Holland ends *here*, opposite it, at the Ems River"—indicating a dismal cavity in the coast, sown with names suggestive of mud, and wrecks, and dreariness.

"What date was this?" I asked.

"About the ninth of this month."

"Why, that's only a fortnight before you wired to me! You were pretty quick getting to Flensburg. Wait a bit, we want another chart. Is this the next?"

"Yes; but we scarcely need it. I only went a little way further on—to Norderney, in fact, the third German island—then I decided to go straight for the Baltic. I had always had an idea of getting there, as Knight did in the *Falcon*. So I made a passage of it to the Eider River, *there* on the West Schleswig coast, took the river and canal through to Kiel on the Baltic, and from there made another passage up north to Flensburg. I was a week there, and then you came, and here we are. And now let's turn in. We'll have a fine sail to-morrow!" He ended with rather forced vivacity, and briskly rolled up the chart. The reluctance he had shown from the first to talk about his cruise had been for a brief space forgotten in his enthusiasm about a portion of it, but had returned markedly in this bald conclusion. I felt sure that there was more in it than mere disinclination to spin nautical yarns in the "hardy Corinthian" style, which can be so offensive in amateur yachtsmen; and I thought I guessed the explanation. His voyage single-handed to the Baltic from the Frisian Islands had been a foolhardy enterprise, with perilous incidents, which, rather than make light of, he would not refer to at all. Probably he was ashamed of his recklessness and wished to ignore it with me, an inexperienced acquaintance not yet enamoured of the *Dulcibella's* way of life, whom both courtesy and interest demanded that he should inspire with confidence. I liked him all the better as I came to this conclusion, but I was tempted to persist a little.

"I slept the whole afternoon," I said; "and, to tell the truth, I rather dread the idea of going to bed, it's so tiring. Look here, you've rushed over that last part like an express train. That passage to the Schleswig coast—the Eider River, did you say?—was a longish one, wasn't it?"

"Well, you see what it was; about seventy miles, I suppose, direct." He spoke low, bending down to sweep up some cigar ashes on the floor.

"Direct?" I insinuated. "Then you put in somewhere?"

"I stopped once, anchored for the night; oh, that's nothing of a sail with a fair wind. By Jove! I've forgotten to caulk that seam over your bunk, and it's going to rain. I must do it now. You turn in."

He disappeared. My curiosity, never very consuming, was banished by concern as to the open seam; for the prospect of a big drop, remorseless and regular as Fate, falling on my forehead throughout the night, as in the torture-chamber of the Inquisition, was alarming enough to recall me wholly to the immediate future. So I went to bed,

finding on the whole that I had made progress in the exercise, though still far from being the trained contortionist that the occasion called for. Hammering ceased, and Davies reappeared just as I was stretched on the rack—tucked up in my bunk, I mean.

"I say," he said, when he was settled in his, and darkness reigned, "do you think you'll like this sort of thing?"

"If there are many places about here as beautiful as this," I replied, "I think I shall. But I should like to land now and then and have a walk. Of course, a great deal depends on the weather, doesn't it? I hope this rain" (drops had begun to patter overhead) "doesn't mean that the summer's over for good."

"Oh, you can sail just the same," said Davies, "unless it's very bad. There's plenty of sheltered water. There's bound to be a change soon. But then there are the ducks. The colder and stormier it is, the better for them."

I had forgotten the ducks and the cold, and, suddenly presented as a shooting-box in inclement weather, the *Dulcibella* lost ground in my estimation, which she had latterly gained.

"I'm fond of shooting," I said, "but I'm afraid I'm only a fair-weather yachtsman, and I should much prefer sun and scenery."

"Scenery," he repeated, reflectively. "I say, you must have thought it a queer taste of mine to cruise about on that outlandish Frisian coast. How would you like that sort of thing?"

"I should loathe it," I answered, promptly, with a clear conscience. "Weren't you delighted yourself to get to the Baltic? It must be a wonderful contrast to what you described. Did you ever see another yacht there?"

"Only one," he answered. "Good night!"

"Good night!"

CHAPTER FIVE

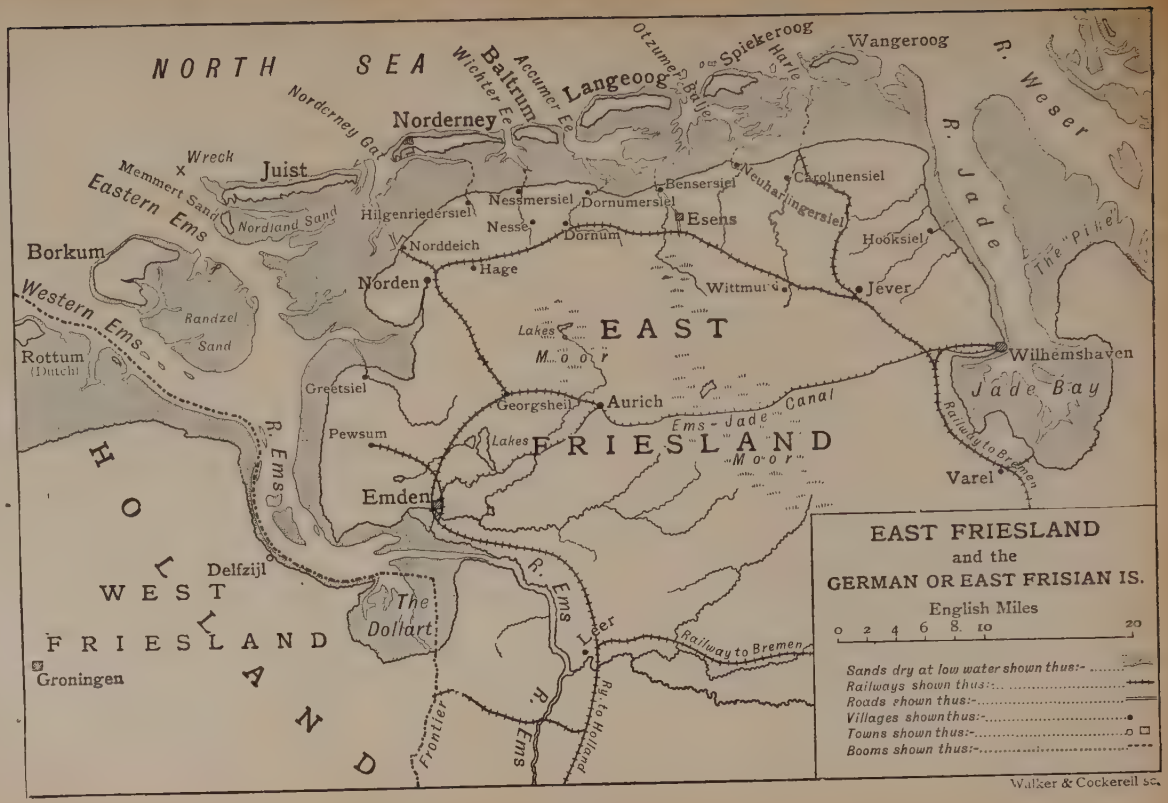
WANTED, A NORTH WIND

NOTHING disturbed my rest that night, so adaptable is youth and so masterful is nature. At times I was remotely aware of a threshing of rain and a humming of wind, with a nervous kicking of the little hull, and at one moment I dreamt I saw an apparition by candle-light of Davies, clad in pyjamas and huge top-boots, grasping a misty lantern of gigantic proportions. But the apparition mounted the ladder and disappeared, and I passed to other dreams.

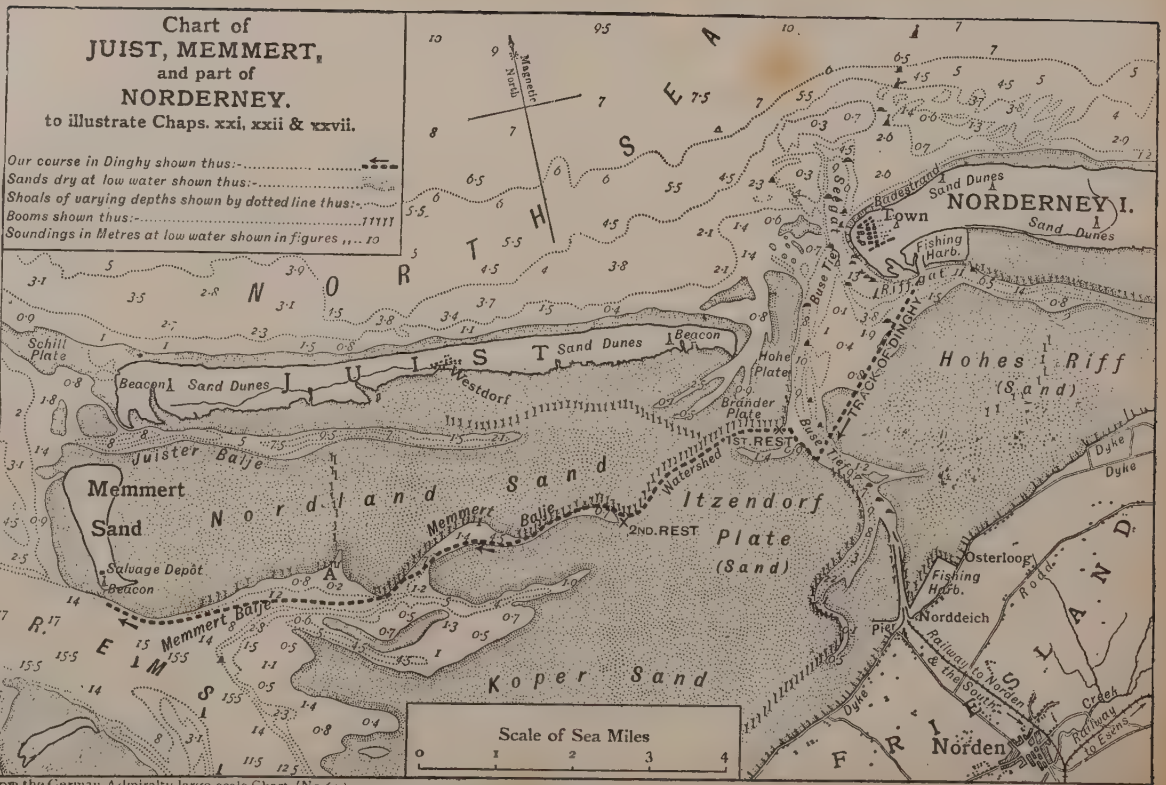
A blast in my ear, like the voice of fifty trombones, galvanised me into full consciousness. The musician, smiling and tousled, was at my bedside raising a foghorn to his lips with deadly intention. "It's a way we have in the *Dulcibella*," he said, as I started up on one elbow. "I didn't startle you much, did I?" he added.

"Well, I like the *mattinata* better than the cold douche," I answered, thinking of yesterday.

"Fine day and magnificent breeze!" he answered. My sensations this morning were vastly livelier than those of yesterday at the same hour. My limbs were supple again and my head clear. Not even the searching wind could mar the ecstasy of that plunge down to smooth, seductive sand, where I buried greedy fingers and looked through a medium blue, with that translucent blue, fairy-faint and angel-pure, that you see in perfection only in the heart of ice. Up again to sun, wind, and the forest whispers from the shore; down just once more to see the uncouth anchor stabbing the sand's soft bosom with one rusty fang, deaf and inert to the *Dulcibella's* puny efforts to drag him from his prey. Back, holding by the cable as a rusty clue from heaven to earth, up to that *bourgeois* little maiden's bows; back to breakfast, with an appetite not to be blunted by condensed milk and somewhat *passé* bread. An hour later we had dressed the *Dulcibella* for the road, and were foaming into the grey void of yesterday.


NORTH SEA
Norderney Gat
Norderney
Baltrum
Wichter Ee
Accumer Ee
Langeoog
Otzumer Balje
Spiekeroog
Harle
Wangeroog
R. Weser
R. Jade
The "Pilot"
Wreck
Juist
Memmert Sand
Eastern Ems
Nordland Sand
Hilgenriedersiel
Nessmersiel
Dornumersiel
Bensersiel
Neuharlingersiel
Carolinensiel
Esens
Nesse
Dornum
Hooksiel
Borkum
Norddeich
Hage
Norden
Wittmund
Jever
Western Ems
Randzel Sand
Rottum (Dutch)
Lakes
EAST
Moor
Wilhelmshaven
Jade Bay
Greetsiel
Georgsheil
Aurich
Ems-Jade Canal
Railway to Bremen
Pewsum
Lakes
FRIESLAND
Moor
Varel
R. Ems
HOLLAND
Emden
Delfzijl
WEST
FRIESLAND
The Dollart
R. Ems
Leer
Railway to Bremen
Groningen
Frontier
R. Ems
Rail to Holland
EAST FRIESLAND
and the
GERMAN OR EAST FRISIAN IS.
English Miles
0 2 4 6 8 10 20
Sands dry at low water shown thus:-
Railways shown thus:-
Roads shown thus:-
Villages shown thus:-
Towns shown thus:-
Booms shown thus:-
Walker & Cockerell sc.

MAP B.



From the German Admiralty large-scale Chart. (No.64.)

Walker & Cockerell sc.

CHART B.

now a noble expanse of wind-whipped blue, half surrounded by distant hills, their every outline vivid in the rain-washed air.

I cannot pretend that I really enjoyed this first sail into the open, though I was keenly anxious to do so. I felt the thrill of those forward leaps, heard that persuasive song the foam sings under the lee-bow, saw the flashing harmonies of sea and sky; but sensuous perception was deadened by nervousness. The yacht looked smaller than ever outside the quiet fiord. The song of the foam seemed very near, the wave crests aft very high. The novice in sailing clings desperately to the thought of sailors—effective, prudent persons, with a typical jargon and a typical dress, versed in local currents and winds. I could not help missing this professional element. Davies, as he sat grasping his beloved tiller, looked strikingly efficient in his way, and supremely at home in his surroundings; but he looked the amateur through and through, as with one hand, and (it seemed) one eye, he wrestled with a spray-splashed chart half unrolled on the deck beside him. All his casual ways returned to me—his casual talk and that last adventurous voyage to the Baltic, and the suspicions his reticence had aroused.

"Do you see a monument anywhere?" he said, all at once; and, before I could answer: "We must take another reef." He let go of the tiller and relit his pipe, while the yacht rounded sharply to, and in a twinkling was tossing head to sea with loud claps of her canvas and passionate jerks of her boom, as the wind leapt on its quarry, now turning to bay, with redoubled force. The sting of spray in my eyes and the Babel of noise dazed me; but Davies, with a pull on the fore-sheet, soothed the tormented little ship, and left her coolly sparring with the waves while he shortened sail and puffed his pipe. An hour later the narrow vista of Als Sound was visible, with quiet old Sonderburg sunning itself on the island shore, and the Dybbol heights towering above—the Dybbol of bloody memory; scene of the last desperate stand of the Danes in '64, ere the Prussians wrested the two fair provinces from them.

"It's early to anchor, and I hate towns," said Davies, as one section of a lumbering pontoon bridge opened to give us passage. But I was firm on the need for a walk, and got my way on condition that I bought stores as well, and returned in time to admit of further advance to a "quiet anchorage." Never did I step on the solid earth with stranger feelings, partly due to relief from confinement, partly to that sense of independence in travelling, which, for those who go down to the sea in small ships, can make the foulest coal-port in Northumbria seem attractive. And here I had fascinating Sonderburg, with its broad-eaved houses of carved woodwork, each fresh with cleansing, yet reverend with age; its fair-haired Viking-like men, and rosy, plain-faced women, with their bullet foreheads and large mouths; Sonderburg still Danish to the core under its Teuton veneer. Crossing the bridge I climbed the Dybbol—dotted with memorials of that heroic defence—and thence could see the wee form and gossamer rigging of the *Dulcibella* on the silver ribbon of the Sound, and was reminded by the sight that there were stores to be bought. So I hurried down again to the old quarter and bargained over eggs and bread with a dear old lady, pink as a *débutante*, who made a patriotic pretence of not understanding German, and called in her strapping son, whose few words of English, being chiefly nautical slang picked up on a British trawler, were peculiarly useless for the purpose. Davies had tea ready when I came aboard again, and, drinking it on deck, we proceeded up the sheltered Sound, which, in spite of its imposing name, was no bigger than an inland river, only the hosts of rainbow jelly-fish reminding us that we were threading a highway of ocean. There is no rise and fall of tide in these regions to disfigure the shore with mud. Here was a shelving gravel bank; there a bed of whispering rushes; there again young birch trees growing to the very brink, each wearing a stocking of bright moss and setting its foot firmly in among golden leaves and scarlet fungus.

Davies was pre-occupied, but he lighted up when I talked of the Danish war. "Germany's a thundering great nation," he said; "I wonder if we shall ever fight her." A little incident that happened after we anchored deepened the impression left by this conversation. We crept at dusk into a shaded backwater, where our keel almost touched the gravel bed. Opposite us on the Alsen shore there showed, clean-cut against the sky, the spire of a little monument rising from a leafy hollow.

"I wonder what that is," I said. It was scarcely a minute's row in the dinghy, and when the anchor was down we sculled over to it. A bank of loam led to gorse and bramble. Pushing aside some branches we came to a slender Gothic memorial in grey stone, inscribed with bas-reliefs of battle scenes, showing Prussians forcing a landing in boats and Danes resisting with savage tenacity. In the failing light we spelt out an inscription: "Den bie dem Meeres Uebergange und der Eroberung von Alsen am 29 Juni 1864 heldenmüthig gefallenen zum ehrenden Gedächtniss." "To the honoured memory of those who died heroically at the invasion and storming of Alsen." I knew the German passion for commemoration; I had seen similar memorials on Alsatian battlefields, and several on the Dybbol only that afternoon; but there was something in the scene, the hour, and the circumstances, which made this one seem singularly touching. As for Davies, I scarcely recognised him; his eyes flashed and filled with tears as he glanced from the inscription to the path we had followed and the water beyond. "It was a landing in boats, I suppose," he said, half to himself. "I wonder they managed it. What does *heldenmüthig* mean?"—"Heroically."—"Heldenmüthig gefallenen," he repeated, under his breath, lingering on each syllable. He was like a schoolboy reading of Waterloo.

Our conversation at dinner turned naturally on war, and in naval warfare I found I had come upon Davies's literary hobby. I had not hitherto paid attention to the medley on our bookshelf, but I now saw that, besides a Nautical Almanack and some dilapidated "Sailing Directions," there were several books on the cruises of small yachts, and also some big volumes crushed in anyhow or lying on the top. Squinting painfully at them I saw Mahan's "Life of Nelson," Brassey's "Naval Annual," and others.

"It's a tremendously interesting subject," said Davies, pulling down (in two pieces) a volume of Mahan's "Influence of Sea Power."

Dinner flagged (and froze) while he illustrated a point by reference to the much-thumbed pages. He was very keen, and not very articulate. I knew just enough to be an intelligent listener, and, though hungry, was delighted to hear him talk.

"I'm not boring you, am I?" he said, suddenly.

"I should think not," I protested. "But you might just have a look at the chops."

They had indeed been crying aloud for notice for some minutes, and drew candid attention to their neglect when they appeared. The diversion they caused put Davies out of vein. I tried to revive the subject, but he was reserved and diffident.

The untidy bookshelf reminded me of the logbook, and when Davies had retired with the crockery to the forecastle, I pulled the ledger down and turned over the leaves. It was a mass of short entries, with cryptic abbreviations, winds, tides, weather, and courses appearing to predominate. The voyage from Dover to Ostend was dismissed in two lines: "Under way 7 p.m., wind W.S.W. moderate; West Hinder 5 a.m., outside all banks; Ostend 11 a.m." The Scheldt had a couple of pages very technical and *staccato* in style. Inland Holland was given a contemptuous summary, with some half-hearted allusions to windmills, and so on, and a caustic word or two about boys, paint, and canal smells.

At Amsterdam technicalities began again, and a brisker tone pervaded the entries, which became progressively fuller as the writer cruised on the Frisian coast. He was clearly in better spirits, for here and there were quaint and laboured efforts to describe nature out of material which, as far as I could

judge, was repellent enough to discourage the most brilliant and observant of writers; with an occasional note of a visit on shore, generally reached by a walk of half a mile over sand, and of talks with shop people and fishermen. But such lighter relief was rare. The bulk dealt with channels and shoals with weird and depressing names, with the centre-plate, the sails, and the wind, buoys and "booms," tides and "berths" for the night. "Kedging off" appeared to be a frequent diversion; "running aground" was of almost daily occurrence.

It was not easy reading, and I turned the leaves rapidly. I was curious, too, to see the latter part. I came to a point where the rain of little sentences, pattering out like small shot, ceased abruptly. It was at the end of September 9th. That day, with its "kedging" and "boom-dodging," was filled in with the usual detail. The log then leapt over three days, and went on: "*Sept.* 13*th.*—Wind W.N.W. fresh. Decided to go to Baltic. Sailed 4 a.m. Quick passage E. ½ S. to mouth of Weser. Anchored for night under Hohenhörn Sand. *Sept.* 14*th.*—*Nil.* *Sept.* 15*th.*—Under way at 4 a.m. Wind East moderate. Course W. by S.; four miles; N.E. by N. fifteen miles Norderpiep 9.30. Eider River 11.30." This recital of naked facts was quite characteristic when "passages" were concerned, and any curiosity I had felt about his reticence on the previous night would have been rather allayed than stimulated had I not noticed that a page had been torn out of the book just at this point. The frayed edge left had been pruned and picked into very small limits; but dissimulation was not Davies's strong point, and a child could have seen that a leaf was missing, and that the entries, starting from the evening of September 9th (where a page ended), had been written together at one sitting. I was on the point of calling to Davies, and chaffing him with having committed a grave offence against maritime law in having "cooked" his log; but I checked myself, I scarcely know why, probably because I guessed the joke would touch a sensitive place and fail. Delicacy shrank from seeing him compelled either to amplify a deception or blunder out a confession—he was too easy a prey; and, after all, the matter was of small moment. I returned the book to the shelf, the only definite result of its perusal being to recall my promise to keep a diary myself, and I then and there dedicated a notebook to the purpose.

We were just lighting our cigars when we heard voices and the splash of oars, followed by a bump against the hull which made Davies wince, as violations of his paint always did. "Guten Abend; wo fahren Sie hin?" greeted us as we climbed on deck. It turned out to be some jovial fishermen returning to their smack from a visit to Sonderburg. A short dialogue proved to them that we were mad Englishmen in bitter need of charity.

"Come to Satrup," they said; "all the smacks are there, round the point. There is good punch in the inn."

Nothing loth, we followed in the dinghy, skirted a bend of the Sound, and opened up the lights of a village, with some smacks at anchor in front of it. We were escorted to the inn, and introduced to a formidable beverage, called coffee-punch, and a smoke-wreathed circle of smacksmen, who talked German out of courtesy, but were Danish in all else. Davies was at once at home with them, to a degree, indeed, that I envied. His German was of the crudest kind, *bizarre* in vocabulary and comical in accent; but the freemasonry of the sea, or some charm of his own, gave intuition to both him and his hearers. I cut a poor figure in this nautical gathering, though Davies, who persistently referred to me as "meiner Freund," tried hard to represent me as a kindred spirit and to include me in the general talk. I was detected at once as an uninteresting hybrid. Davies, who sometimes appealed to me for a word, was deep in talk over anchorages and ducks, especially, as I well remember now, about the chance of sport in a certain *Schlei Fiord*. I fell into utter neglect, till rescued by a taciturn person in spectacles and a very high cap, who appeared to be the only landsman present. After silently puffing smoke in my direction for some time, he asked

me if I was married, and if not, when I proposed to be. After this inquisition he abandoned me.

It was eleven before we left this hospitable inn, escorted by the whole party to the dinghy. Our friends of the smack insisted on our sharing their boat out of pure good-fellowship—for there was not nearly room for us—and would not let us go till a bucket of fresh-caught fish had been emptied into her bottom. After much shaking of scaly hands, we sculled back to the *Dulcibella*, where she slept in a bed of tremulous stars.

Davies sniffed the wind and scanned the tree-tops, where light gusts were toying with the leaves.

"Sou'-west still," he said, "and more rain coming. But it's bound to shift into the north."

"Will that be a good wind for us?"

"It depends where we go," he said, slowly. "I was asking those fellows about duck-shooting. They seemed to think the best place would be Schlei Fiord. That's about fifteen miles south of Sonderburg, on the way to Kiel. They said there was a pilot chap living at the mouth who would tell us all about it. They weren't very encouraging though. We should want a north wind for that."

"I don't care where we go," I said, to my own surprise.

"Don't you really?" he rejoined, with sudden warmth. Then, with a slight change of voice, "You mean it's all very jolly about here?"

Of course I meant that. Before we went below we both looked for a moment at the little grey memorial; its slender fretted arch outlined in tender lights and darks above the hollow on the Alsen shore. The night was that of September 27th, the third I had spent on the *Dulcibella*.

CHAPTER SIX

SCHLEI FIORD

I MAKE no apology for having described these early days in some detail. It is no wonder that their trivialities are as vividly before me as the colours of earth and sea in this enchanting corner of the world. For every trifle, sordid or picturesque, was relevant; every scrap of talk a link; every passing mood critical for good or ill. So slight indeed were the determining causes that changed my autumn holiday into an undertaking the most momentous I have ever approached.

Two days more preceded the change. On the first, the south-westerly wind still holding, we sallied forth into Augustenburg Fiord, "to practise smartness in a heavy thresh," as Davies put it. It was the day of dedication for those disgusting oilskins, immured in whose stiff and odorous angles, I felt distressfully cumbersome; a day of proof indeed for me, for heavy squalls swept incessantly over the loch, and Davies, at my own request, gave me no rest. Backwards and forwards we tacked, blustering into coves and out again, reefing and unreefing, now stung with rain, now warmed with sun, but never with time to breathe or think.

I wrestled with intractable ropes, slaves if they could be subdued, tyrants if they got the upper hand; creeping, craning, straining, I made the painful round of the deck, while Davies, hatless and tranquil, directed my blundering movements.

"Now take the helm and try steering in a hard breeze to windward. It's the finest sport on earth."

So I grappled with the niceties of that delicate craft; smarting eyes, chafed hands, and dazed brain all pressed into the service, whilst Davies, taming the ropes the while, shouted into my ear the subtle mysteries of the art; that fidgetting ripple in the luff of the mainsail, and the distant rattle from the hungry jib—signs that they are starved of wind and must be given more; the heavy list and wallow of the hull, the feel of the wind on your cheek instead of your nose, the broader angle of the

burgee at the masthead—signs that they have too much, and that she is sagging recreantly to leeward instead of fighting to windward. He taught me the tactics for meeting squalls, and the way to press your advantage when they are defeated—the iron hand in the velvet glove that the wilful tiller needs if you are to gain your ends with it; the exact set of the sheets necessary to get the easiest and swiftest play of the hull—all these things and many more I struggled to apprehend, careless for the moment as to whether they were worth knowing, but doggedly set on knowing them. Needless to say, I had no eyes for beauty. The wooded inlets we dived into gave a brief respite from wind and spindrift, but called into use the lead and the centre-board tackle—two new and cumbrous complexities. Davies's passion for intricate navigation had to be sated even in these secure and tideless waters.

"Let's get in as near as we can—you stand by the lead," was his formula; so I made false casts, tripped up in the slack, sent rivers of water up my sleeves, and committed all the other *gaucheries* that beginners in the art commit, while the sand showed whiter beneath the keel, till Davies regretfully drew off and shouted: "Ready about, centre-plate down," and I dashed down to the trappings of that diabolical contrivance, the only part of the *Dulcibella's* equipment that I hated fiercely to the last. It had an odious habit when lowered of spouting jets of water through its chain-lead on to the cabin floor. One of my duties was to gag it with cotton-waste, but even then its choking gurgle was a most uncomfortable sound in your dining-room. In a minute the creek would be behind us and we would be thumping our stem into the short hollow waves of the fiord, and lurching through spray and rain for some point on the opposite shore. Of our destination and objects, if we had any, I knew nothing. At the northern end of the fiord, just before we turned, Davies had turned dreamy in the most exasperating way, for I was steering at the time and in mortal need of sympathetic guidance, if I was to avoid a sudden jibe. As though continuing aloud some internal debate, he held a one-sided argument to the effect that it was no use going further north. Ducks, weather, and charts figured in it, but I did not follow the pros and cons. I only know that we suddenly turned and began to "battle" south again. At sunset we were back once more in the same quiet pool among the trees and fields of Als Sound, a wondrous peace succeeding the turmoil. Bruised and sodden, I was extricating myself from my oily prison, and later was tasting (though not nearly yet in its perfection) the unique exultation that follows such a day, when, glowing all over, deliciously tired and pleasantly sore, you eat what seems ambrosia, be it only tinned beef; and drink nectar, be it only distilled from terrestrial hops or coffee berries, and inhale as culminating luxury balmy fumes which even the happy Homeric gods knew naught of.

On the following morning, the 30th, a joyous shout of "Nor'-west wind" sent me shivering on deck, in the small hours, to handle rain-stiff canvas and cutting chain. It was a cloudy, unsettled day, but still enough after yesterday's boisterous ordeal. We retraced our way past Sonderburg, and thence sailed for a faint line of pale green on the far south-western horizon. It was during this passage that an incident occurred which, slight as it was, opened my eyes to much.

A flight of wild duck crossed our bows at some little distance, a wedge-shaped phalanx of craning necks and flapping wings. I happened to be steering while Davies verified our course below; but I called him up at once, and a discussion began about our chances of sport. Davies was gloomy over them.

"Those fellows at Satrup were rather doubtful," he said. "There are plenty of ducks, but I made out that it's not easy for strangers to get shooting. The whole country's so very civilised; it's not *wild* enough, is it?"

He looked at me. I had no very clear opinion. It was anything but wild in one sense, but there seemed to be wild enough spots for ducks. The shore we were passing appeared to be bordered by lonely marshes, though a spacious champaign showed behind. If it were

not for the beautiful places we had seen, and my growing taste for our way of seeing them, his disappointing vagueness would have nettled me more than it did. For, after all, he had brought me out loaded with sporting equipment under a promise of shooting.

"I thought you proposed making inquiries at Schlei Fiord," I said. "Let us do that, and take our chance; if there's no sport to be had, it can't be helped. By the look of the chart it's a splendid fiord; we can explore it and have shelter if there's more bad weather. If it gets very bad, we must just see." Davies kept me to the point.

"Bad weather is what we want for ducks," he said; "but I'm afraid we're in the wrong place for them. Now, if it was the North Sea, among those Frisian islands——" His tone was timid and interrogative, and I felt at once that he was sounding me as to some unpalatable plan whose nature began to dawn on me.

He stammered on through a sentence or two about "wildness" and "nobody to interfere with you," and then I broke in: "You surely don't want to leave the Baltic?"

"Why not?" said he, staring into the compass.

"Hang it, man!" I returned, tartly, "here we are in October, the summer over, and the weather gone to pieces. We're alone in a cockle-shell boat, at a time when every other yacht of our size is laying up for the winter. Luckily, we seem to have struck an ideal cruising-ground, with a wide choice of safe fiords and a good prospect of ducks, if we choose to take a little trouble about them. You can't mean to waste time and run risks" (I thought of the torn leaf in the log-book) "in a long voyage to those forbidding haunts of yours in the North Sea."

"It's not very long," said Davies, doggedly. "Part of it's canal, and the rest is quite safe if you're careful. There's plenty of sheltered water, and it's not really necessary——"

"What's it all *for*?" I interrupted, impatiently. "We haven't *tried* for shooting here yet. You've no notion, have you, of getting the boat back to England this autumn?"

"England?" he muttered. "Oh, I don't much care." Again his vagueness jarred on me; there seemed to be some bar between us, invisible and insurmountable. And, after all, what was I doing here? Roughing it in a shabby little yacht, utterly out of my element, with a man who, a week ago, was nothing to me, and who now was a tiresome enigma. Like swift poison the old morbid mood in which I left London spread through me. All I had learnt and seen slipped away; what I had suffered remained. I was on the point of saying something which might have put a precipitate end to our cruise, but he anticipated me.

"I'm awfully sorry," he broke out, "for being such a selfish brute. I don't know what I was thinking about. You're a brick to join me in this sort of life, and I'm afraid I'm an infernally bad host. Of course this is just the place to cruise. I forgot about the scenery, and all that. Let's ask about the ducks here. As you say, we're sure to get sport, if we worry and push a bit. We must be nearly there now—yes, there's the entrance. Take the helm, will you?"

He sprang up the mast like a monkey, and gazed over the land from the cross-trees. I looked up at my enigma and thanked Providence I had not spoken; for no one could have resisted his frank outburst of good nature. Yet it occurred to me that, considering the conditions of our life, our intimacy was strangely slow in growth. I had no clue yet as to where his idiosyncrasies began and his self ended, and he, I surmised, was in the same stage towards me. Otherwise I should have pressed him further now, for I felt convinced that there was some mystery in his behaviour which I had not yet accounted for. However, light was soon to break.

I could see no sign of the entrance he had spoken of, and no wonder, for it is only eighty yards wide, though it leads to a fiord thirty miles long. All at once we were jolting in a tumble of sea, and the channel grudgingly disclosed itself, stealing between marshes and meadows and then broadening to a mere, as at Ekken. We anchored close to the mouth, and not far from a group of vessels of a type that afterwards grew very familiar to me. They were sailing-

barges, something like those that ply in the Thames, bluff-bowed, high-sterned craft of about fifty tons, ketch-rigged, and fitted with lee-boards, very light spars, and a long tip-tilted bowsprit. (For the future I shall call them "galliots.") Otherwise the only sign of life was a solitary white house—the pilot's house, the chart told us—close to the northern point of entrance. After tea we called on the pilot. Patriarchally installed before a roaring stove, in the company of a buxom bustling daughter-in-law and some rosy grandchildren, we found a rotund and rubicund person, who greeted us with a hoarse roar of welcome in German, which instantly changed, when he saw us, to the funniest broken English, spoken with intense relish and pride. We explained ourselves and our mission as well as we could through the hospitable interruptions caused by beer and the strains of a huge musical box, which had been set going in honour of our arrival. Needless to say, I was read like a book at once, and fell into the part of listener.

"Yes, yes," he said, "all right. There is plenty ducks, but first we will drink a glass beer; then we will shift your ship, captain—she lies not good there." (Davies started up in a panic, but was waved back to his beer.) "Then we will drink together another glass beer; then we will talk of ducks—no, then we will kill ducks—that is better. Then we will have plenty glasses beer."

This was an unexpected climax, and promised well for our prospects. And the programme was fully carried out. After the beer our host was packed briskly by his daughter into an armour of woollen gaiters, coats, and mufflers, topped with a worsted helmet, which left nothing of his face visible but a pair of twinkling eyes. Thus equipped, he led the way out of doors, and roared for Hans and his gun, till a great gawky youth, with high cheek-bones and a downy beard, came out from the yard and sheepishly shook our hands.

Together we repaired to the quay, where the pilot stood, looking like a genial ball of worsted, and bawled hoarse directions while we shifted the *Dulcibella* to a berth on the farther shore close to the other vessels. We returned with our guns, and the interval for refreshments followed. It was just dusk when we sallied out again, crossed a stretch of bog-land, and took up strategic posts round a stagnant pond. Hans had been sent to drive, and the result was a fine mallard and three ducks. It was true that all fell to the pilot's gun, perhaps owing to Hans's filial instinct and his parent's canny egotism in choosing his own lair, or perhaps it was chance; but the shooting-party was none the less a triumphal success. It was celebrated with beer and music as before, while the pilot, an infant on each podgy knee, discoursed exuberantly on the glories of his country and the Elysian content of his life. "There is plenty beer, plenty meat, plenty money, plenty ducks," summed up his survey.

It may have been fancy, but Davies, though he had fits and starts of vivacity, seemed very inattentive, considering that we were sitting at the feet of so expansive an oracle. It was I who elicited most of the practical information—details of time, weather, and likely places for shooting, with some shrewd hints as to the kind of people to conciliate. Whatever he thought of me, I warmed with sympathy towards the pilot, for he assumed that we had done with cruising for the year, and thought us mad enough as it was to have been afloat so long, and madder still to intend living on "so little a ship" when we could live on land with beer and music handy. I was tempted to raise the North Sea question, just to watch Davies under the thunder of rebukes which would follow. But I refrained from a wish to be tender with him, now that all was going so well. The Frisian Islands were an extravagant absurdity now. I did not even refer to them as we pulled back to the *Dulcibella*, after swearing eternal friendship with the good pilot and his family.

Davies and I turned in good friends that night—or rather I should say that I turned in, for I left him sucking an empty pipe and aimlessly fingering a volume of Mahan; and once when I woke in the night I felt somehow that his bunk was empty and that he was there in the dark cabin, dreaming.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE MISSING PAGE

I WOKE (on October 1st) with that dispiriting sensation that a hitch has occurred in a settled plan. It was explained when I went on deck, and I found the *Dulcibella* wrapped in a fog, silent, clammy, nothing visible from her decks but the ghostly hull of a galliot at anchor near us. She must have brought up there in the night, for there had been nothing so close the evening before; and I remembered that my sleep had been broken once by sounds of rumbling chain and gruff voices.

"This looks pretty hopeless for to-day," I said, with a shiver, to Davies, who was laying the breakfast.

"Well, we can't do anything till this fog lifts," he answered, with a good deal of resignation. Breakfast was a cheerless meal. The damp penetrated to the very cabin, whose roof and walls wept a fine dew. I had dreaded a bathe, and yet missed it, and the ghastly light made the tablecloth look dirtier than it naturally was, and all the accessories more sordid. Something had gone wrong with the bacon, and the lack of egg-cups was not in the least humorous.

Davies was just beginning, in his summary way, to tumble the things together for washing up, when there was a sound of a step on deck, two sea-boots appeared on the ladder, and, before we could wonder who the visitor was, a little man in oilskins and a sou'-wester was stooping towards us in the cabin door, smiling affectionately at Davies out of a round grizzled beard.

"Well met, captain," he said, quietly, in German. "Where are you bound to this time?"

"Bartels!" exclaimed Davies, jumping up. The two stooping figures, young and old, beamed at one another like father and son.

"Where have you come from? Have some coffee. How's the *Johannes*? Was that you that came in last night? I'm delighted to see you!" (I spare the reader his uncouth lingo.) The little man was dragged in and seated on the opposite sofa to me.

"I took my apples to Kappeln," he said, sedately, "and now I sail to Kiel, and so to Hamburg, where my wife and children are. It is my last voyage of the year. You are no longer alone, captain, I see." He had taken off his dripping sou'-wester and was bowing ceremoniously towards me.

"Oh, I quite forgot!" said Davies, who had been kneeling on one knee in the low doorway, absorbed in his visitor. "This is '*meiner Freund*,' Herr Carruthers. Carruthers, this is my friend, Schiffer Bartels, of the galliot *Johannes*."

Was I never to be at an end of the puzzles which Davies presented to me? All the impulsive heartiness died out of his voice and manner as he uttered the last few words, and there he was, nervously glancing from the visitor to me, like one who, against his will or from tactlessness, has introduced two persons who he knows will disagree.

There was a pause while he fumbled with the cups, poured some cold coffee out and pondered over it as though it were a chemical experiment. Then he muttered something about boiling some more water, and took refuge in the forecastle. I was ill at ease at this period with seafaring men, but this mild little person was easy ground for a beginner. Besides, when he took off his oilskin coat he reminded me less of a sailor than of a homely draper of some country town, with his clean turned-down collar and neatly fitting frieze jacket. We exchanged some polite platitudes about the fog and his voyage last night from Kappeln, which appeared to be a town some fifteen miles up the fiord.

Davies joined in from the forecastle with an excess of warmth which almost took the words out of my mouth. We exhausted the subject very soon, and then my *vis-à-vis* smiled paternally at me, as he had done at Davies, and said, confidentially:—

"It is good that the captain is no more alone. He is a fine young man—Heaven, what a fine young man! I love him as my son—but he is too brave, too reckless. It is good for him to have a friend."

I nodded and laughed, though in reality I was very far from being amused.

"Where was it you met?" I asked.

"In an ugly place, and in ugly weather," he answered, gravely, but with a twinkle of fun in his eye. "But has he not told you?" he added, with ponderous slyness. "I came just in time. No! what am I saying? He is brave as a lion and quick as a cat. I think he cannot drown; but still it was an ugly place and ugly——"

"What are you talking about, Bartels?" interrupted Davies, emerging noisily with a boiling kettle.

I answered the question. "I was just asking your friend how it was you made his acquaintance."

"Oh, he helped me out of a bit of a mess in the North Sea, didn't you, Bartels?" he said.

"It was nothing," said Bartels. "But the North Sea is no place for your little boat, captain. So I have told you many times. How did you like Flensburg? A fine town, is it not? Did you find Herr Krank, the carpenter? I see you have placed a little mizzen-mast. The rudder was nothing much, but it was well that it held to the Eider. But she is strong and good, your little ship, and—Heaven!—she had need be so." He chuckled, and shook his head at Davies as at a wayward child.

This is all the conversation that I need record. For my part I merely waited for its end, determined on my course, which was to know the truth once and for all, and make an end of these distracting mystifications. Davies plied his friend with coffee, and kept up the talk gallantly; but affectionate as he was, his manner plainly showed that he wanted to be alone with me.

The gist of the little skipper's talk was a parental warning that, though we were well enough here in the "Ost-See," it was time for little boats to be looking for winter quarters. That he himself was going by the Kiel Canal to Hamburg to spend a cosy winter as a decent citizen at his warm fireside, and that we should follow his example. He ended with an invitation to us to visit him on the *Johannes*, and with suave farewells disappeared into the fog. Davies saw him into his boat, returned without wasting a moment, and sat down on the sofa opposite me.

"What did he mean?" I asked.

"I'll tell you," said Davies. "I'll tell you the whole thing. As far as you're concerned it's partly a confession. Last night I had made up my mind to say nothing, but when Bartels turned up I knew it must all come out. It's been fearfully on my mind, and perhaps you'll be able to help me. But it's for you to decide."

"Fire away!" I said.

"You know what I was saying about the Frisian Islands the other day? A thing happened there which I never told you, when you were asking about my cruise."

"It began near Norderney," I put in.

"How did you guess that?" he asked.

"You're a bad hand at duplicity," I replied. "Go on."

"Well, you're quite right, it was there, on September 9th. I told you the sort of thing I was doing at that time, but I don't think I said that I made inquiries from one or two people about duck-shooting, and had been told by some fishermen at Borkum that there was a big sailing-yacht in those waters, whose owner, a German of the name of Dollmann, shot a good deal, and might give me some tips. Well, I found this yacht one evening, knowing it must be her from the description I had. She was what is called a 'barge-yacht,' of fifty or sixty tons, built for shallow water on the lines of a Dutch galliot, with lee-boards and those queer round bows and square stern. She's something like those galliots anchored near us now. You sometimes see the same sort of yacht in English waters, only there they copy the Thames barges. She looked a clipper of her sort, and very smart; varnished all over and shining like gold. I came on her about sunset, after a long day of exploring round the Ems estuary. She was lying in——"

"Wait a bit, let's have the chart," I interrupted.

Davies found it and spread it on the table between us, first pushing back the cloth and the breakfast things to one

end, where they lay in a slovenly litter. This was one of the only two occasions on which I ever saw him postpone the rite of washing up, and it spoke volumes for the urgency of the matter in hand.

"Here it is," said Davies (see Map A), and I looked with a new and strange interest at the long string of slender islands, the parallel line of coast, and the confusion of shoals, banks, and channels which lay between. "Here's Norderney, you see. By the way, there's a harbour there at the west end of the island, the only real harbour on the whole line of islands, Dutch or German, except at Terschelling. There's quite a big town there, too, a watering place, where Germans go for sea-bathing in the summer. Well, the *Medusa*, that was her name, was lying in the Riff Gat roadstead, flying the German ensign, and I anchored for the night pretty near her. I meant to visit her owner later on, but I very nearly changed my mind, as I always feel rather a fool on smart yachts, and my German isn't very good. However, I thought I might as well; so, after dinner, when it was dark, I sculled over in the dinghy, hailed a sailor on deck, said who I was, and asked if I could see the owner. The sailor was a surly sort of chap, and there was a good long delay while I waited on deck, feeling more and more uncomfortable. Presently a steward came up and showed me down the companion and into the saloon, which, after *this*, looked—well, horribly gorgeous—you know what I mean, plush lounges, silk cushions, and that sort of thing. Dinner seemed to be just over, and wine and fruit were on the table. Herr Dollmann was there at his coffee. I introduced myself somehow——"

"Stop a moment," I said; "what was he like?"

"Oh, a tall, thin chap, in evening dress; about fifty I suppose, with greyish hair and a short beard. I'm not good at describing people. He had a high, bulging forehead, and there was something about him—but I think I'd better tell you the bare facts first. I can't say he seemed pleased to see me, and he couldn't speak English, and, in fact, I felt infernally awkward. Still, I had an object in coming, and as I was there I thought I might as well gain it."

The notion of Davies in his Norfolk jacket and rusty flannels haranguing a frigid German in evening dress in a "gorgeous" saloon tickled my fancy greatly.

"He seemed very much astonished to see me; had evidently seen the *Dulcibella* arrive, and had wondered what she was. I began as soon as I could about the ducks, but he shut me up at once, said I could do nothing hereabouts. I put it down to sportsman's jealousy—you know what that is. But I saw I had come to the wrong shop, and was just going to back out and end this unpleasant interview, when he thawed a bit, offered me some wine, and began talking in quite a friendly way, taking a great interest in my cruise and my plans for the future. In the end we sat up quite late, though I never felt really at my ease. He seemed to be taking stock of me all the time, as though I were some new animal." (How I sympathised with that German!) "We parted civilly enough, and I rowed back and turned in, meaning to potter on eastwards early next day.

"But I was knocked up at dawn by a sailor with a message from Dollmann asking if he could come to breakfast with me. I was rather flabbergasted, but didn't like to be rude, so I said, 'Yes.' Well, he came, and I returned the call—and—well, the end of it was that I stayed at anchor there for three days." This was rather abrupt.

"How did you spend the time?" I asked. Stopping three days anywhere was an unusual event for him, as I knew from his log.

"Oh, I lunched or dined with him once or twice—with *them*, I ought to say," he added, hurriedly. "His daughter was with him. She didn't appear the evening I first called."

"And what was she like?" I asked, promptly, before he could hurry on.

"Oh, she seemed a very nice girl," was the guarded reply, delivered with particular unconcern, "and—the end of it was that I and the *Medusa* sailed away in company. I must tell you how it came about, just in a few words for the present.

"It was his suggestion. He said he had to sail to Hamburg, and proposed that I should go with him in the *Dulcibella* as far as the Elbe, and then, if I liked, I could take the ship canal at Brunspüttel through to Kiel and the Baltic. I had no very fixed plans of my own, though I had meant to go on exploring eastwards between the islands and the coast, and so reach the Elbe in a much slower way. He dissuaded me from this, sticking to it that I should have no chance of ducks, and urging other reasons. Anyway, we settled to sail in company direct to Cuxhaven, in the Elbe. With a fair wind and an early start it should be only one day's sail of about sixty miles.

"The plan only came to a head on the evening of the third day, September 12.

"I told you, I think, that the weather had broken after a long spell of heat. That very day it had been blowing pretty hard from the west, and the glass was falling still. I said, of course, that I couldn't go with him if the weather was too bad, but he prophesied a good day, said it was an easy sail, and altogether put me on my mettle. You can guess how it was. Perhaps I had talked about single-handed cruising as though it were easier than it was, though I never meant it in a boasting way, for I hate that sort of thing, and besides there *is* no danger if you're careful——"

"Oh, go on," I said.

"Anyway, we went next morning at six. It was a dirty-looking day, wind W.N.W., but his sails were going up and mine followed. I took two reefs in, and we sailed out into the open and steered E.N.E. along the coast for the Outer Elbe Lightship about fifty knots off. Here it all is, you see." (He showed me the course on the chart.) "The trip was nothing for his boat, of course, a safe, powerful old tub, forging through the sea as steady as a house. I kept up with her easily at first. My hands were pretty full, for there was a hard wind on my quarter and a troublesome sea; but as long as nothing worse came I knew I should be all right, though I also knew that I was a fool to have come.

"All went well till we were off Wangeroog, the last of the islands—*here*—and then it began to blow really hard. I had half a mind to chuck it and cut into the Jade River, *down there;* but I hadn't the face to, so I hove to and took in my last reef." (Simple words, simply uttered; but I had seen the operation in calm water and shuddered at the present picture.) "We had been about level till then, but with my shortened canvas I fell behind. Not that that mattered in the least. I knew my course, had read up my tides, and, thick as the weather was, I had no doubt of being able to pick up the lightship. No change of plan was possible now. The Weser estuary was on my starboard hand, but the whole place was a lee-shore and a mass of unknown banks—just look at them. I ran on, the *Dulcibella* doing her level best, but we had some narrow shaves of being pooped. I was about *here*, say six miles south-west of the lightship,* when I suddenly saw that the *Medusa* had hove to right ahead, as though waiting till I came up. She wore round again on the course as I drew level, and we were alongside for a bit. Dollmann lashed the wheel, leaned over her quarter, and shouted, very slowly and distinctly so that I could understand: 'Follow me—sea too bad for you outside — short cut through sands—save six miles.'

"It was taking me all my time to manage the tiller, but I knew what he meant at once, for I had been over the chart carefully the night before.† You see, the whole bay between Wangeroog and the Elbe is encumbered with sand. A great jagged chunk of it runs out from Cuxhaven in a north-westerly direction for fifteen miles or so, ending in a pointed spit, called the *Scharhorn*. To reach the Elbe from the west you have to go right outside this, round the lightship, which is off the Scharhorn, and double back. Of course, that's what all big vessels do. But, as you see, these sands are intersected here and there by channels, very shallow and winding, exactly like those behind the Frisian Islands. Now look at this one, which cuts right through the big chunk

* See Chart A. † See Map A.

of sand and comes out near Cuxhaven. The *Telte* * it's called. It's miles wide, you see, at the entrance, but later on it is split into two by the Hohenhörn bank; then it gets shallow and very complicated, and ends in a mere tidal driblet with another name. It's just the sort of channel I should like to worry into on a fine day or with an off-shore wind. Alone, in thick weather and a heavy sea, it would have been folly to attempt it, except as a desperate resource. But, as I said, I knew at once that Dollmann was proposing to run for it and guide me in.

"I didn't like the idea, because I like doing things for myself, and, silly as it sounds, I believe I resented being told the sea was too bad for me, which it certainly was. Yet the short cut did save several miles and a devil of a tumble off the Scharhorn, where two tides meet. I had complete faith in Dollmann, and I suppose I decided that I should be a fool not to take a good chance. I hesitated, I know; but in the end I nodded, and held up my arm as she forged ahead again. Soon after, she shifted her course and I followed. You asked me once if I ever took a pilot. That was the only time."

He spoke with bitter gravity, flung himself back, and felt his pocket for his pipe. It was not meant for a dramatic pause, but it certainly was one. I had just a glimpse of still another Davies—a Davies five years older, throbbing with deep emotions, scorn, passion, and stubborn purpose; a being above my plane, of sterner stuff, wider scope. Intense as my interest had become, I waited almost timidly while he mechanically rammed tobacco into his pipe and struck ineffectual matches. I felt that whatever the riddle to be solved, it was no mean one. He repressed himself with an effort, half rose, and made his circular glance at the clock, barometer, and skylight, and then resumed.

"We soon came to what I knew must be the beginning of the Telte channel. All round you could hear the breakers on the sands, though it was too thick to see them yet. As the water shoaled, the sea, of course, got shorter and steeper. There was more wind—a whole gale I should say.

"I kept dead in the wake of the *Medusa*, but to my disgust I found she was gaining on me very fast. Of course I had taken for granted, when he said he would lead me in, that he would slow down and keep close to me. He could easily have done so by getting his men up to check his sheets or drop his peak. Instead of that he was busting on for all he was worth. Once, in a rain-squall, I lost sight of him altogether; got him faintly again, but had enough to do with my own tiller not to want to be peering through the scud after a runaway pilot. I was all right so far, but we were fast approaching the worst part of the whole passage, where the Hohenhörn bank blocks the road, and the channel divides. I don't know what it looks like to you on the chart—perhaps fairly simple, because you can follow the twists of the channels, as on a ground-plan; but a stranger coming to a place like that (where there are no buoys, mind you) can tell nothing certain by the eye—unless perhaps at dead low water, when the banks are high and dry, and in very clear weather—he must trust to the lead and the compass, and feel his way step by step. I knew perfectly well that what I should soon see would be a wall of surf stretching right across and on both sides. To *feel* one's way in that sort of weather is impossible. You must *know* your way, or else have a pilot. I had one, but he was playing his own game.

"With a second hand on board to steer while I conned I should have felt less of an ass. As it was, I knew I ought to be facing the music in the offing, and cursed myself for having broken my rule and gone blundering into this confounded short cut. It was giving myself away, doing just the very thing that you can't do in single-handed sailing.

"By the time I realised the danger it was far too late to turn and hammer out to the open. I was deep in the bottle-neck bight of the sands, jammed on a lee shore, and a strong flood tide sweeping me on. That tide, by the way, gave just the ghost of a chance. I had the hours in my head, and knew it was

* See Chart A.

about two-thirds flood, with two hours more of rising water. That meant the banks would all be covering when I reached them, and harder than ever to locate; but it also meant that I *might* float right over the worst of them if I hit off a lucky place." Davies thumped the table in disgust. "Pah! It makes me sick to think of having to trust to an accident like that, like a lubberly cockney out for a boosy Bank Holiday sail. Well, just as I foresaw, the wall of surf appeared clean across the horizon, and curling back to shut me in, booming like thunder. When I last saw the *Medusa* she seemed to be charging it like a horse at a fence, and I took a rough bearing of her position by a hurried glance at the compass. At that very moment I *thought* she seemed to luff and show some of her broadside; but a squall blotted her out and gave me hell with the tiller. After that she was lost in the white mist that hung over the line of breakers. I kept on my bearing as well as I could, but I was already out of the channel. I knew that by the look of the water, and as we neared the bank I saw it was all awash and without the vestige of an opening. I wasn't going to chuck her on to it without an effort; so, more by instinct than with any particular hope, I put the helm down, meaning to work her along the edge on the chance of spotting a way over. She was buried at once by the beam sea, and the jib flew to blazes; but the reefed stays'l stood, she recovered gamely, and I held on, though I knew it could only be for a few minutes, as the centre-plate was up, and she made frightful leeway towards the bank.

"I was half blinded by scud, but suddenly I noticed what looked like a gap, behind a spit which curled out right ahead. I luffed still more to clear this spit, but she couldn't weather it. Before you could say knife she was driving across it, bumped heavily, bucked forward again, bumped again, and—ripped on in deeper water! I can't describe the next few minutes. I was in some sort of channel, but a very narrow one, and the sea broke everywhere. I hadn't proper command either; for the rudder had crocked up somehow at the last bump. I was like a drunken man running for his life down a dark alley, barking himself at every corner. It couldn't last long, and finally we went crash on to something and stopped there, grinding and banging. So ended that little trip under a pilot.

"Well, it was like this—there was really no danger"—I opened my eyes at the characteristic phrase. "I mean, that lucky stumble into a channel was my salvation. Since then I had struggled through a mile of sands, all of which lay behind me like a breakwater against the gale. They were covered, of course, and seething like soapsuds; but the force of the sea was deadened. The *Dulce* was bumping, but not too heavily. It was nearing high tide, and at half ebb she would be high and dry.

"In the ordinary way I should have run out a kedge with the dinghy, and at the next high water sailed further in and anchored where I could lie afloat. The trouble was now that my hand was hurt and my dinghy stove in, not to mention the rudder business. It was the first bump on the outer edge that did the damage. There was a heavy swell there, and when we struck, the dinghy, which was towing astern, came home on her painter and down with a crash on the yacht's weather quarter. I stuck out one hand to ward it off and got it nipped on the gunwale. She was badly stove in and useless, so I couldn't run out the kedge"—this was Greek to me, but I let him go on—"and for the present my hand was too painful even to stow the boom and sails, which were whipping and racketing about anyhow. There was the rudder, too, to be mended; and we were several miles from the nearest land. Of course, if the wind fell, it was all easy enough; but if it held or increased it was a poor look-out. There's a limit to strain of that sort—and other things might have happened.

"In fact, it was precious lucky that Bartels turned up. His galliot was at anchor a mile away, up a branch of the channel. In a clear between squalls he saw us, and, like a brick, rowed his boat out—he and his boy, and a devil of a

pull they must have had. I was glad enough to see them—no, that's not true; I was in such a fury of disgust and shame that I believe I should have been idiot enough to say I didn't want help, if he hadn't just nipped on board and started work. He's a terror to work, that little mouse of a chap. In half an hour he had stowed the sails, unshackled the big anchor, run out fifty fathoms of warp, and hauled her off there and then into deep water. Then they towed her up the channel—it was dead to leeward and an easy job—and berthed her near their own vessel. It was dark by that time, so I gave them a drink, and said good-night. It blew a howling gale that night, but the place was safe enough, with good ground-tackle.

"The whole affair was over; and after supper I thought hard about it all."

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE THEORY

DAVIES leaned back and gave a deep sigh, as though he still felt the relief from some tension. I did the same, and felt the same relief. The chart, freed from the pressure of our fingers, rolled up with a flip, as though to say, "What do you think of that?" I have straightened out his sentences a little, for in the excitement of his story they had grown more and more jerky and elliptical.

"What about Dollmann?" I asked.

"Of course," said Davies, "what about him? I didn't get at much that night. It was all so sudden. The only thing I could have sworn to from the first was that he had purposely left me in the lurch that day. I pieced out the rest in the next few days, which I'll just finish with as shortly as I can. Bartels came aboard next morning, and though it was blowing hard still we managed to shift the *Dulcibella* to a place where she dried safely at the mid-day low water, and we could get at her rudder. The lower screw-plate on the stern post had wrenched out, and we botched it up roughly as a make-shift. There were other little breakages, but nothing to matter, and the loss of the jib was nothing, as I had two spare ones. The dinghy was past repair just then, and I lashed it on deck.

"It turned out that Bartels was carrying apples from Bremen to Kappeln (in this fiord), and had run into that channel in the sands for shelter from the weather. To-day he was bound for the Eider River, whence, as I told you, you can get through (by river and canal) into the Baltic. Of course the Elbe route, by the new Kaiser Wilhelm Ship Canal, is the shortest. The Eider route is the old one, but he hoped to get rid of some of his apples at Tönning, the town at its mouth. Both routes touch the Baltic at Kiel. As you know, I had been running for the Elbe, but yesterday's muck-up put me off, and I changed my mind—I'll tell you why presently—and decided to sail to the Eider along with the *Johannes*, and get through that way. It cleared from the east next day, and I raced him there, winning hands down, left him at Tönning, and in three days was in the Baltic. It was just a week after I ran ashore that I wired to you. You see, I had come to the conclusion that *that chap was a spy*."

In the end it came out quite quietly and suddenly, and left me in profound amazement. "I wired to you—that chap was a spy." It was the close association of these two ideas that hit me hardest at the moment. For a second I was back in the dreary splendour of the London club-room, spelling out that crabbed scrawl from Davies, and fastidiously criticising its proposal in the light of a holiday. Holiday! What was to be its issue? Chilling and opaque as the fog that filtered through the skylight there flooded my imagination a mist of doubt and fear.

"A spy!" I repeated blankly. "What do you mean? Why did you wire to me? A spy of what—of whom?"

"I'll tell you how I worked it out," said Davies. "I don't think 'spy' is

the right word; but I mean something pretty bad.

"He purposely put me ashore. I don't think I'm suspicious by nature, but I know something about boats and the sea. I know he could have kept close to me if he had chosen, and I saw the whole place at low water when we left those sands on the second day. Look at the chart again. Here's the Hohenhörn bank that I showed you as blocking the road.* It's in two pieces —first the west and then the east. You see the Telte channel dividing into two branches and curving round it. Both branches are broad and deep, as channels go in those waters. Now, in sailing in I was nowhere near either of them. When I last saw Dollmann he must have been steering straight for the bank itself, at a point somewhere *here*, quite a mile from the northern arm of the channel, and two from the southern. I followed by compass, as you know, and found nothing but breakers ahead. How did I get through? That's where the luck came in. I spoke of only two channels, that is, *round* the bank—one to the north, the other to the south. But look closely and you'll see that right through the centre of the West Hohenhörn runs another, a very narrow and winding one, so small that I hadn't even noticed it the night before, when I was going over the chart. That was the one I stumbled into in that tailor's fashion, as I was groping along the edge of the surf in a desperate effort to gain time. I bolted down it blindly, came out into this strip of open water, crossed that aimlessly, and brought up on the edge of the *East* Hohenhörn, *here*. It was more than I deserved. I can see now that it was a hundred to one in favour of my striking on a bad place outside, where I should have gone to pieces in three minutes."

"And how did Dollmann go?" I asked.

"It's as clear as possible," Davies answered. "He doubled back into the northern channel when he had misled me enough. Do you remember my saying that when I last saw him *I thought* he had luffed and showed his broadside? I had another bit of luck in that. He was luffing towards the north—so it struck me through the blur —and when I in my turn came up to the bank, and had to turn one way or the other to avoid it, I think I should naturally have turned north too, as he had done. In that case I should have been done for, for I should have had a mile of the bank to skirt before reaching the north channel, and should have driven ashore long before I got there. But as a matter of fact I turned south."

"Why?"

"Couldn't help it. I was running on the starboard tack—boom over to port; to turn north would have meant a jibe, and as things were I couldn't risk one. It was blowing like fits; if anything had carried away I should have been on shore in a jiffy. I scarcely thought about it at all, but put the helm down and turned her south. Though I knew nothing about it, that little central channel was now on my port hand, distant about two cables. The whole thing was luck from beginning to end."

Helped by pluck, I thought to myself, as I tried with my landsman's fancy to conjure up that perilous scene. As to the truth of the affair, the chart and Davies's version were easy enough to follow, but I felt only half convinced. The "spy," as Davies strangely called his pilot, might have honestly mistaken the course himself, outstripped his convoy inadvertently, and escaped disaster as narrowly as she did. I suggested this on the spur of the moment, but Davies was impatient.

"Wait till you hear the whole thing," he said. "I must go back to when I first met him. I told you that on that first evening he began by being as rude as a bear and as cold as stone, and then became suddenly friendly. I can see now that in the talk that followed he was pumping me hard. It was an easy game to play, for I hadn't seen a gentleman since Morrison left me. I was tremendously keen about my voyage, and I thought the chap was a good sportsman, even if he was a bit dark about the ducks. I talked quite freely —at least, as freely as I could with my bad German—about my last fortnight's

* See Chart A.

sailing; how I had been smelling out all the channels in and out of the islands, how interested I had been in the whole business, puzzling out the effect of the winds on the tides, the set of the currents, and so on. I talked about my difficulties, too; the changes in the buoys, the prehistoric rottenness of the English charts. He drew me out as much as he could, and in the light of what followed I can see the point of scores of his questions.

"The next day and the next I saw a good deal of him, and the same thing went on. And then there were my plans for the future. My idea was, as I told you, to go on exploring the German coast just as I had the Dutch. His idea —Heavens, how plainly I see it now!— was to choke me off, get me to clear out altogether from that part of the coast. That was why he said there were no ducks. That was why he cracked up the Baltic as a cruising-ground and shooting-ground. And that was why he broached and stuck to that plan of sailing in company direct to the Elbe. It was to *see* me clear."

"He improved on that."

"Yes, but after that, it's guess-work. I mean that I can't tell when he first decided to go one better and drown me. He couldn't count for certain on bad weather, though he held my nose to it when it came. But, granted that he wanted to get rid of me altogether, he got a magnificent chance on that trip to the Elbe lightship. I expect it struck him suddenly, and he acted on the impulse. Left to myself I was all right; but the short cut was a grand idea of his. Everything was in its favour—wind, sea, sand, tide. He thinks I'm dead."

"But the crew?" I said; "what about the crew?"

"That's another thing. When he first hove to, waiting for me, of course they were on deck (two of them, I think) hauling at sheets. But by the time I had drawn up level the *Medusa* had worn round again on her course, and no one was on deck but Dollmann at the wheel. No one overheard what he said."

"Wouldn't they have *seen* you again?"

"Very likely not; the weather was very thick, and the *Dulce* is very small."

The incongruity of the whole business was striking me. Why should anyone want to kill Davies, and why should Davies, the soul of modesty and simplicity, imagine that anyone wanted to kill him? He must have cogent reasons, for he was the last man to give way to a morbid fancy.

"Go on," I said. "What was his motive? A German finds an Englishman exploring a bit of German coast, determines to stop him, and even to get rid of him. It looks so far as if *you* were thought to be the spy."

Davies winced. "*But he's not a German,*" he said, hotly. "He's an Englishman."

"An Englishman!"

"Yes, I'm sure of it. Not that I've much to go on. He professed to know very little English, and never spoke it, except a word or two now and then to help me out of a sentence; and as to his German, he seemed to me to speak it like a native; but, of course, I'm no judge." Davies sighed. "That's where I wanted someone like you. You would have spotted him at once, if he wasn't German. I go more by a—what do you call it?—a——"

"General impression," I suggested.

"Yes, that's what I mean. It was something in his looks and manner; you know how different we are from foreigners. And it wasn't only himself, it was the way he talked—I mean about cruising and the sea, especially. It's true he let me do most of the talking; but, all the same—how can I explain it? I felt we understood one another, in a way that two foreigners wouldn't. He pretended to think me a bit crazy for coming so far in a small boat, but I could swear he knew as much about the game as I did; for lots of little questions he asked had the right ring in them. Mind you, all this is an after-thought. I should never have bothered about it—I'm not cut out for a Sherlock Holmes—if it hadn't been for what followed."

"It's rather vague," I said. "Have you no more definite reason for thinking him English?"

"There were one or two things rather more definite," said Davies, slowly. "You know when he hove to

and hailed me, proposing the short cut, I told you roughly what he said. I forget the exact words, but 'abschneiden' came in—'durch Watten' and 'abschneiden' (they call the banks 'watts,' you know); they were simple words, and he shouted them loud, so as to carry through the wind. I understood what he meant, but, as I told you, I hesitated before consenting. I suppose he thought I didn't understand, for just as he was drawing ahead again he pointed to the suth'ard, and then shouted through his hands as a trumpet 'Verstehen Sie? short-cut through sands; follow me!' the last two sentences in downright English. I can hear those words now, and I'll swear they were in his native tongue. Of course I thought nothing of it at the time. I was quite aware that he knew a few English words, though he had always mispronounced them; an easy trick when your hearer suspects nothing. But I needn't say that just then I was observant of trifles. I don't pretend to be able to unravel a plot and steer a small boat before a heavy sea at the same moment."

"And if he was piloting you into the next world he could afford to commit himself before you parted! Was there anything else? By the way, how did the daughter strike you? Did she look English, too?"

Two men cannot discuss a woman freely without a deep foundation of intimacy, and, until this day, the subject had never arisen between us in any form. It was the last that was likely to, for I could have divined that Davies would have met it with an armour of reserve. He was busy putting on this armour now; yet I could not help feeling a little brutal as I saw how badly he jointed his clumsy suit of mail. Our ages were the same, but I laugh now to think how old and *blasé* I felt as the flush warmed his brown skin, and he slowly propounded the verdict, "Yes, I think she did."

"She *talked* nothing but German, I suppose?"

"Oh, of course."

"Did you see much of her?"

"A good deal."

"Was she——" (how frame it?) "Did she want you to sail to the Elbe with them?"

"She seemed to," admitted Davies, reluctantly, clutching at his ally, the match-box. "But, hang it, don't dream that she knew what was coming," he added, with sudden fire.

I pondered and wondered, shrinking from further inquisition, easy as it would have been with so truthful a victim, and banishing all thought of ill-timed chaff. There was a cross-current in this strange affair, whose depth and strength I was beginning to gauge with increasing seriousness. I did not know my man yet, and I did not know myself. A conviction that events in the near future would force us into complete mutual confidence withheld me from pressing him too far. I returned to the main question; who was Dollmann, and what was his motive? Davies struggled out of his armour.

"I'm convinced," he said, "that he's an Englishman in German service. He must be in German service; for he had evidently been in those waters a long time, and knew every inch of them; of course, it's a very lonely part of the world, but he has a house on Norderney Island; and he, and all about him, must be well known to a certain number of people. One of his friends I happened to meet; what do you think he was? A naval officer. It was on the afternoon of the third day, and we were having coffee on the deck of the *Medusa*, and talking about next day's trip, when a little launch came buzzing up from seaward, drew alongside, and this chap I'm speaking of came on board, shook hands with Dollmann, and stared hard at me. Dollmann introduced us, calling him Commander von Brüning, in command of the torpedo gunboat *Blitz*. He pointed towards Norderney, and I saw her—a low, grey rat of a vessel—anchored in the Roads about two miles away. It turned out that she was doing the work of fishery guardship on that part of the coast.

"I must say I took to him at once. He looked a real good sort, and a splendid officer, too—just the sort of chap I should have liked to be. You know I always wanted—but that's an old story, and can wait. I had some

talk with him, and we got on capitally as far as we went, but that wasn't far, for I left pretty soon, guessing that they wanted to be alone."

"*Were* they alone then?" I asked, innocently.

"Oh, Fräulein Dollmann was there, of course," explained Davies, feeling for his armour again.

"Did he seem to know them well?" I pursued, inconsequently.

"Oh, yes, very well."

Scenting a faint clue, I felt the need of feminine weapons for my sensitive antagonist. But the opportunity passed.

"That was the last I saw of him," he said. "We sailed, as I told you, at daybreak next morning. Now, have you got any idea what I'm driving at?"

"A rough idea," I answered. "Go ahead."

Davies sat up to the table, unrolled the chart with a vigorous sweep of his two hands, and took up his parable with new zest.

"I start with two certainties," he said. "One is that I was 'moved on' from that coast, because I was too inquisitive. The other is that Dollmann is at some devil's work there which is worth finding out. Now"—he paused in a gasping effort to be logical and articulate. "Now—well, look at the chart. No, better still, look first at this map of Germany. It's on a small scale, and you can see the whole thing." He snatched down a pocket-map from the shelf and unfolded it.* "Here's this huge empire, stretching half over central Europe—an empire growing like wildfire, I believe, in people, and wealth, and everything. They've licked the French, and the Austrians, and are the greatest military power in Europe. I wish I knew more about all that, but what I'm concerned with is their sea-power. It's a new thing with them, but it's going strong, and that Emperor of theirs is running it for all it's worth. He's a splendid chap, and anyone can see he's right. They've got no colonies to speak of, and *must* have them, like us. They can't get them and keep them, and they can't protect their huge commerce without naval strength. The command of the sea is *the* thing nowadays, isn't it? I say, don't think these are my ideas," he added, naïvely. "It's all out of Mahan and those fellows. Well, the Germans have got a small fleet at present, but it's a thundering good one, and they're building hard. There's the —— and the ——." He broke off into a digression on armaments and speeds in which I could not follow him. He seemed to know every ship by heart. I had to recall him to the point. "Well, think of Germany as a new sea-power," he resumed. "The next thing is, what is her coast-line? It's a very queer one, as you know, split clean in two by Denmark, most of it lying east of that and looking on the Baltic, which is practically an inland sea, with its entrance blocked by Danish islands. It was to evade that block that William built the ship canal from Kiel to the Elbe, but that could be easily smashed in war-time. Far the most important bit of coast-line is that which lies *west* of Denmark and looks on the North Sea. It's there that Germany gets her head out into the open, so to speak. It's there that she fronts us and France, the two great sea-powers of Western Europe, and it's there that her greatest ports are and her richest commerce.

"Now it must strike you at once that it's ridiculously short compared with the huge country behind it. From Borkum to the Elbe, as the crow flies, is only seventy miles. Add to that the west coast of Schleswig, say 120 miles. Total, say, two hundred. Compare that with the seaboard of France and England. Doesn't it stand to reason that every inch of it is important? Now what *sort* of coast is it? Even on this small map you can see at once, by all those wavy lines, shoals and sand everywhere, blocking nine-tenths of the land altogether, and doing their best to block the other tenth where the great rivers run in. Now let's take it bit by bit. You see it divides itself into three. Beginning from the west the *first piece* is from Borkum to Wangeroog—fifty odd miles. What's that like? A string of sandy islands backed by sand; the Ems river at the western end, on the Dutch border, leading to Emden—not much of a place. Otherwise, no coast

* See Map A.

towns at all. *Second piece*: a deep sort of bay consisting of the three great estuaries—the Jade, the Weser, and the Elbe—leading to Wilhelmshaven (their North Sea naval base), Bremen, and Hamburg. Total breadth of bay twenty odd miles only; sandbanks littered about all through it. *Third piece:* the Schleswig coast, hopelessly fenced in behind a six to eight mile fringe of sand. No big towns; one moderate river, the Eider. Let's leave that third piece aside. I may be wrong, but, in thinking this business out, I've pegged away chiefly at the other two, the seventy mile stretch from Borkum to the Elbe—half of it estuaries, and half islands. It was there that I found the *Medusa*, and it's that stretch that, thanks to him, I missed exploring."

I made an obvious conjecture. "I suppose there are forts and coast defences? Perhaps he thought you would see too much. By the way, he saw your naval books, of course?"

"Exactly. Of course that was my first idea; but it can't be that. It doesn't explain things in the least. To begin with, there *are* no forts and can be none in that first division, where the islands are. There might be something on Borkum to defend the Ems; but it's very unlikely, and, anyway, I had passed Borkum and was at Norderney. There's nothing else to defend. Of course it's different in the second division, where the big rivers are. There are probably hosts of forts and mines round Wilhelmshaven and Bremerhaven, and at Cuxhaven just at the mouth of the Elbe. Not that I should ever dream of bothering about them; every steamer that goes in would see as much as me. Personally, I much prefer to stay on board, and don't often go on shore. And, good Heavens!" (Davies leant back and laughed joyously) "do I *look* like that kind of spy?"

I figured to myself one of those romantic gentlemen that one reads of in sixpenny magazines, with a kodak in his tie-pin, a sketch-book in the lining of his coat, and a selection of disguises in his hand luggage. Little disposed for merriment as I was, I could not help smiling, too.

"About this coast," resumed Davies. "In the event of war it seems to me that every inch of it would be important, *sand and all*. Take the big estuaries first, which, of course, might be attacked or blockaded by an enemy. At first sight you would say that their main channels were the only things that mattered. Now, in time of peace there's no secrecy about the navigation of these. They're buoyed and lighted like streets, open to the whole world, and taking an immense traffic; well charted, too, as millions of pounds in commerce depend on them. But now look at the sands they run through, intersected, as I showed you, by threads of channels, tidal for the most part, and probably only known to smacks and shallow coasters, like that galliot of Bartels.

"It strikes me that in a war a lot might depend on these, both in defence and attack, for there's plenty of water in them at the right tide for patrol-boats and small torpedo craft, though I can see they take a lot of knowing. Now, say *we* were at war with Germany—both sides could use them as lines between the three estuaries; and to take our own case, a small torpedo-boat (not a destroyer, mind you) could on a dark night cut clean through from the Jade to the Elbe and play the deuce with the shipping there. But the trouble is that I doubt if there's a soul in our fleet who knows those channels. *We* haven't coasters there; and, as to yachts, it's a most unlikely game for an English yacht to play at; but it does so happen that I have a fancy for that sort of thing and would have explored those channels in the ordinary course." I began to see his drift.

"Now for the islands. I was rather stumped there at first, I grant, because, though there are lashings of sand behind them, and the same sort of intersecting channels, yet there seems nothing important to guard or attack.

"Why shouldn't a stranger ramble as he pleases through them? Still, Dollmann had his headquarters there, and I was sure that had some meaning. Then it struck me that the same point held good, for that strip of Frisian coast adjoins the estuaries, and would also form a splendid base for raiding

midgets, which could travel unseen right through from the Ems to the Jade, and so to the Elbe, as by a covered way between a line of forts.

"Now here again it's an unknown land to us. Plenty of local galliots travel it, but strangers never, I should say. Perhaps at the most an occasional foreign yacht gropes in at one of the gaps between the islands for shelter from bad weather, and is precious lucky to get in safe. Once again, it was my fad to like such places, and Dollmann cleared me out. He's not a German, but he's in with Germans, and naval Germans too. He's established on that coast, and knows it by heart. And he tried to drown me. Now what do you think?" He gazed at me long and anxiously.

CHAPTER NINE

I SIGN ARTICLES

It was not an easy question to answer, for the affair was utterly outside all my experience; its background the sea, and its actual scene a region of the sea of which I was blankly ignorant. There were other difficulties that I could see perhaps better than Davies, an enthusiast with hobbies, who had been brooding in solitude over his dangerous adventure. Yet both narrative and theory (which have lost, I fear, in interpretation to the reader) had strongly affected me; his forcible roughnesses, tricks of manner, sudden bursts of ardour, sudden retreats into shyness, making up a charm I cannot render. I found myself continually trying to see the man through the boy, to distinguish sober judgment from the hot-headed vagaries of youth. Not that I dreamed for a moment of dismissing the story of his wreck as an hallucination. His clear blue eyes and sane simplicity threw ridicule on such treatment.

Evidently, too, he wanted my help, a matter that might well have influenced my opinion on the facts, had he been other than he was. But it would have taken a "finished and finite clod" to resist the attraction of the man and the enterprise; and I take no credit whatever for deciding to follow him, right or wrong. So, when I stated my difficulties, I knew very well that we should go.

"There are two main points that I don't understand," I said. "First, you've never explained why an *Englishman* should be watching those waters and ejecting intruders; secondly, your theory doesn't supply sufficient motive. There may be much in what you say about the navigation of those channels, but it's not enough. You say he wanted to drown you—a big charge, requiring a big motive to support it. But I don't deny that you've got a strong case." Davies lighted up. "I'm willing to take a good deal for granted—until we find out more."

He jumped up, and did a thing I never saw him do before or since—bumped his head against the cabin roof.

"You mean that you'll come?" he exclaimed. "Why, I hadn't even asked you! Yes, I want to go back and clear up the whole thing. I know now that I want to; telling it all to you has been such an immense relief. And a lot depended on you, too, and that's why I've been feeling such an absolute hypocrite. I say, how can I apologise?"

"Don't worry about me; I've had a splendid time. And I'll come right enough; but I should like to know exactly what you——"

"No; but wait till I just make a clean breast of it—about you, I mean. You see, I came to the conclusion that I could do nothing alone; not that two are really necessary for managing the boat in the ordinary way, but for this sort of job you *do* want two; besides, I can't speak German properly, and I'm a dull chap all round. If my theory, as you call it, is right, it's a case for sharp wits, if ever there was one; so I thought of you. You're clever, and I knew you had lived in Germany and knew German, and I knew," he added, with a little awkwardness, "that you had done a good deal of yachting; but of course I ought to have told you

what you were in for—roughing it in a small boat with no crew. I felt ashamed of myself when you wired back so promptly, and when you came—er—" Davies stammered and hesitated in the humane resolve not to wound my feelings. "Of course I couldn't help noticing that it wasn't what you expected," was the delicate summary he arrived at. "But you took it splendidly," he hastened to add. "Only, somehow, I couldn't bring myself to talk about the plan. It was good enough of you to come out at all, without bothering you with hare-brained schemes. Besides, I wasn't even sure of myself. It's a tangled business. There were reasons, there are reasons still"—he looked nervously at me—"which—well, which make it a tangled business." I had thought a confidence was coming, and was disappointed. "I was in an idiotic state of uncertainty," he hurried on; "but the plan grew on me more and more, when I saw how you were taking to the life and beginning to enjoy yourself. All that about the ducks on the Frisian coast was humbug; part of a stupid idea of decoying you there and gaining time. However, you quite naturally objected, and last night I meant to chuck the whole thing up and give you the best time here I could. Then Bartels turned up——"

"Stop," I put in. "Did you know he might turn up when you sailed here?"

"Yes," said Davies, guiltily. "I knew he might; and now it's all come out, and you'll come! What a fool I've been!"

Long before he had finished I had grasped the whole meaning of the last few days, and had read their meaning into scores of little incidents which had puzzled me.

"For goodness' sake, don't apologise," I protested. "I could make confessions, too, if I liked. And I doubt if you've been such a fool as you think. I'm a patient that wants careful nursing, and it has been the merest chance all through that I haven't rebelled and bolted. We've got a good deal to thank the weather for, and other little stimulants. And you don't know yet my reasons for deciding to try your cure at all."

"My cure?" said Davies; "what in the world do you mean? It was jolly decent of you to——"

"Never mind! There's another view of it, but it doesn't matter now. Let's return to the point. What's your plan of action?"

"It's this," was the prompt reply: "to get back to the North Sea, *via* Kiel and the ship canal. Then there will be two objects: one, to work back to Norderney, where I left off before, exploring all those channels through the estuaries and islands; the other, to find Dollmann, discover what he's up to, and settle with him. The two things may overlap, we can't tell yet. I don't even know where he and his yacht are; but I'll be bound they're somewhere in those same waters, and probably back at Norderney."

"It's a delicate matter," I mused, dubiously, "if your theory's correct. Spying on a spy——"

"It's not like that," said Davies, indignantly. "Anyone who likes can sail about there and explore those waters. I say, you don't really think it's like that, do you?"

"I don't think you're likely to do anything dishonourable," I hastened to explain. "I grant you the sea's public property in your sense. I only mean that developments are possible, which you don't reckon on. There *must* be more to find out than the mere navigation of those channels, and if that's so, mightn't we come to be genuine spies ourselves?"

"And, after all, hang it!" exclaimed Davies, "if it comes to that, why shouldn't we? I look at it like this. The man's an Englishman, and if he's in with Germany he's a traitor to us, and we as Englishmen have a right to expose him. If we can't do it without spying we've a right to spy, at our own risk——"

"There's a stronger argument than that. He tried to take your life."

"I don't care a rap about that. I'm not such an ass as to thirst for revenge and all that, like some chap in a shilling shocker. But it makes me wild to think of that fellow masquerading as a German, and up to who knows what mischief—mischief enough to make him

want to get rid of *any* one. I'm keen about the sea, and I think they're apt to be a bit slack at home," he continued inconsequently. "Those Admiralty chaps want waking up. Anyway, as far as I'm concerned, it's quite natural that I should look him up again."

"Quite," I agreed; "you parted friends, and they may be delighted to see you. You'll have plenty to talk about."

"H'm," said Davies, withered into silence by the "they." "Hullo! I say, do you know it's three o'clock? How the time has gone! And, by Jove! I believe the fog's lifting."

I returned, with a shock, to the present, to the weeping walls, the discoloured deal table, the ghastly breakfast litter—all the visible symbols of the life I had pledged myself to. Disillusionment was making rapid headway when Davies returned, and said, with energy:—

"What do you say to starting for Kiel at once? The fog's going, and there's a breeze from the sou'-west."

"Now?" I protested. "Why, it'll mean sailing all night, won't it?"

"Oh, no," said Davies. "Not with luck."

"Why, it's dark at seven!"

"Yes, but it's only twenty-five miles. I know it's not exactly a fair wind, but we shall lie closehauled most of the way. The glass is falling, and we ought to take this chance."

To argue about winds with Davies was hopeless, and the upshot was that we started lunchless. A pale sun was flickering out of masses of racing vapour, and through delicate vistas between them the fair land of Schleswig now revealed and now withdrew her pretty face, as though smiling *adieux* to her faithless courtiers.

The clank of our chain brought up Bartels to the deck of the *Johannes*, rubbing his eyes and pulling round his throat a grey shawl, which gave him a comical likeness to a lodging house landlady receiving the milk in morning *déshabillé*.

"We're off, Bartels," said Davies, without looking up from his work. "See you at Kiel, I hope."

"You are always in a hurry, captain," bleated the old man, shaking his head. "You should wait till to-morrow. The sky is not good, and it will be dark before you are off Eckenförde."

Davies laughed, and very soon his mentor's sad little figure was lost in haze.

That was a curious evening. Dusk soon fell, and the devil made a determined effort to unman me; first, with the scrambled tea which was the tardy substitute for an orderly lunch, then with the new and nauseous duty of filling the side-lights, which meant squatting in the fo'c'sle to inhale paraffin and dabble in lamp-black; lastly, with an all-round attack on my nerves as the night fell on our frail little vessel, pitching on her precarious way through driving mist. In a sense I think I went through the same sort of mental crisis as when I sat upon my portmanteau at Flensburg. The main issue was not seriously in question, for I had signed on in the *Dulcibella* for good or ill; but in doing so I had outrun myself, and still wanted an outlook, a mood suited to the enterprise, proof against petty discouragements. Not for the first time a sense of the ludicrous came to my assistance, as I saw myself fretting in London under my burden of self-imposed woes, nicely weighing that insidious invitation, and stepping finally into the snare with the dignity due to my importance; kidnapped as neatly as ever a peaceful clerk was kidnapped by a lawless press-gang, and, in the end, finding as the arch-conspirator a guileless and warm-hearted friend, who called me clever, lodged me in a cell, and blandly invited me to talk German to the purpose, as he was aiming at a little secret service on the high seas. Close in the train of Humour came Romance, veiling her face, but I knew it was the rustle of her robes that I heard in the foam beneath me; I knew that it was she who handed me the cup of sparkling wine and bade me drink and be merry. Strange to me though it was, I knew the taste when it touched my lips. It was not that bastard concoction I had tasted in the pseudo-Bohemias of Soho; it was not the showy but insipid beverage I should have drunk my fill of at Morven Lodge; it was the purest of her pure vintages, instilling the ancient inspiration which,

under many guises, quickens thousands of better brains than mine, but whose essence is always the same; the gay pursuit of a perilous quest. Then and there I tried to clinch the matter and keep that mood. In the main I think I succeeded, though I had many lapses.

For the present my veins tingled with the draught. The wind humming into the main-sail, the ghostly wave-crests riding up out of the void, whispered a low thrilling chorus in praise of adventure. Potent indeed must the spell have been, for, in reality, that first night sail teemed with terrors for me. It is true that it began well, for the haze dispersed, as Davies had prophesied, and Bulk Point Lighthouse guided us safely to the mouth of Kiel Fiord. It was during this stage that, crouching together aft, our pipe-bowls glowing sympathetically, we returned to the problem before us; for we had shot out on our quest with volcanic precipitation, leaving much to be discussed. I gleaned a few more facts, though I dispelled no doubts. Davies had only seen the Dollmanns on their yacht, where father and daughter were living for the time. Their villa at Norderney, and their home life there, were unknown to him, though he had landed once at the harbour himself. Further, he had heard vaguely of a stepmother, absent at Hamburg. They were to have joined her on their arrival at that city, which, be it noted, stands a long way up the Elbe, forty miles and more above Cuxhaven, the town at the mouth.

The exact arrangement made on the day before the fatal voyage was that the two yachts should meet in the evening at Cuxhaven and proceed up the river together. Then, in the ordinary course, Davies would have parted company at Brunsbüttel (fifteen miles up), which is the western terminus of the ship canal to the Baltic. Such at least had been his original intention; but, putting two and two together, I gathered that latterly, and perhaps unconfessed to himself, his resolve had weakened, and that he would have followed the *Medusa* to Hamburg, or indeed the end of the world, impelled by the same motive that, contrary to all his tastes and principles, had induced him to abandon his life in the islands and undertake the voyage at all. But on that point he was immovably reticent, and all I could conclude was that the strange cross-current connected with Dollmann's daughter had given him cruel pain and had clouded his judgment to distraction, but that he now was prepared to forget or ignore it, and steer a settled course.

The facts I elicited raised several important questions. Was it not known by this time that he and his yacht had survived? Davies was convinced that it was not. "He may have waited at Cuxhaven, or inquired at the lock at Brunsbüttel," he said. "But there was no need, for I tell you the thing was a certainty. If I had struck and *stuck* on that outer bank, as it was a hundred to one I should do, the yacht would have broken up in three minutes. Bartels would never have seen me, and couldn't have got to me if he had. No one would have seen me. And nothing whatever has happened since to show that they know I'm alive."

"They," I suggested. "Who are 'they'? Who are our adversaries?" If Dollmann were an accredited agent of the German Admiralty—— But, no, it was incredible that the murder of a young Englishman should be connived at in modern days by a friendly and civilised government! Yet, if he were not such an agent, the whole theory fell to the ground.

"I believe," said Davies, "that Dollmann did it off his own bat, and beyond that I can't see. And I don't know that it matters at present. Alive or dead we're doing nothing wrong, and have nothing to be ashamed of."

"I think it matters a good deal," I objected. "Who will be interested in our resurrection, and how are we to go to work, openly or secretly? I suppose we shall keep out of the way as much as we can?"

"As for keeping out of the way," said Davies, jerkily, as he peered to windward under the foresail, "we *must* pass the ship canal; that's a public highway, where anyone can see you. After that there won't be much difficulty. Wait till you see the place!" He gave a low, contented laugh,

which would have frozen my marrow yesterday. "By the way, that reminds me," he added; "we must stop at Kiel for the inside of a day and lay in a lot of stores. We want to be independent of the shore." I said nothing. Independence of the shore in a seven-tonner in October! What an end to aim at!

About nine o'clock we weathered the point, entered Kiel Fiord, and began a dead beat to windward of seven miles to the head of it where Kiel lies. Hitherto, save for latent qualms concerning my total helplessness if anything happened to Davies, interest and excitement had upheld me well. My alarms only began when I thought them nearly over. Davies had frequently urged me to turn in and sleep, and I went so far as to go below and coil myself up on the lee sofa with my pencil and diary. Suddenly there was a flapping and rattling on deck, and I began to slide on to the floor. "What's happened?" I cried, in a panic, for there was Davies stooping in at the cabin door.

"Nothing," he said, chafing his hands for warmth; "I'm only going about. Hand me the glasses, will you? There's a steamer ahead. I say, if you really don't want to turn in, you might make some soup. Just let's look at the chart." He studied it with maddening deliberation, while I wondered how near the steamer was, and what the yacht was doing meanwhile.

"I suppose it's not really necessary for anyone to be at the helm?" I remarked.

"Oh, she's all right for a minute," he said, without looking up. "Two—one and a half—one—lights in line sou'-west by west—got a match?" He expended two, and tumbled upstairs again.

"You don't want me, do you?" I shouted after him.

"No, but come up when you've put the kettle on. It's a pretty beat up the fiord. Lovely breeze."

His legs disappeared. A sort of buoyant fatalism possessed me as I finished my notes and pored over the stove. It upheld me, too, when I went on deck and watched the "pretty beat," whose prettiness was mainly due to the crowd of fog-bound shipping—steamers, smacks, and sailing-vessels—now once more on the move in the confined fairway of the fiord, their baleful eyes of red, green, or yellow, opening and shutting, brightening and fading; while shore-lights and anchor-lights added to my bewilderment, and a throbbing of screws filled the air like the distant roar of London streets. In fact, every time we spun round for our dart across the fiord I felt like a rustic matron gathering her skirts for the transit of the Strand on a busy night. Davies, however, was the street arab who zigzags under the horses' feet unscathed; and all the time he discoursed placidly on the simplicity and safety of night-sailing if only you were careful, obeyed rules, and burnt good lights. As we were nearing the hot glow in the sky that denoted Kiel we passed a huge scintillating bulk moored in midstream. "Warships," he murmured, ecstatically.

At one o'clock we anchored off the town.

CHAPTER TEN

HIS CHANCE

"I SAY, Davies," I said, "how long do you think this trip will last? I've only got a month's leave."

We were standing at slanting desks in the Kiel post-office, Davies scratching diligently at his letter-card, and I staring feebly at mine.

"By Jove!" said Davies, with a start of dismay, "that's only three weeks more; I never thought of that. You couldn't manage to get an extension, could you?"

"I can write to the chief," I admitted; "but where's the answer to come to? We're better without an address, I suppose."

"There's Cuxhaven," reflected Davies; "but that's too near, and there's—but we don't want to be tied down to landing anywhere. I tell you

what, say 'Post Office, Norderney,' just your name, not the yacht's. We *may* get there and be able to call for letters." The casual character of our adventure never struck me more strongly than then.

"Is that what *you're* doing?" I asked.

"Oh, I shan't be having important letters like you."

"But what are you saying?"

"Oh, just that we're having a splendid cruise, and are on our way home."

The notion tickled me, and I said the same in my home letter, adding that we were looking for a friend of Davies's who would be able to show us some sport. I wrote a line, too, to my chief (unaware of the gravity of the step I was taking) saying it was possible that I might have to apply for longer leave, as I had important business to transact in Germany, and asking him kindly to write to the same address. Then we shouldered our parcels and resumed our business.

Two full dinghy-loads of stores we ferried to the *Dulcibella*, chief among which were two immense cans of petroleum, constituting our reserves of heat and light, and a sack of flour. There were spare ropes and blocks, too; German charts of excellent quality; cigars, and many weird brands of sausage and tinned meats, besides a miscellany of oddments, some of which only served in the end to slake my companion's craving for jettison. Clothes were my own chief care, for, freely as I had purged it at Flensburg, my wardrobe was still very unsuitable, and I had already irretrievably damaged two faultless pairs of white flannels. ("We shall be able to throw them overboard," said Davies, hopefully.) So I bought a great pair of seaboots of the country, felt-lined and wooden-soled, and both of us got a number of rough woollen garments (as worn by the local fishermen), breeches, jerseys, helmets, gloves; all of a colour chosen to harmonise with paraffin stains and anchor mud.

The same evening we were taking our last look at the Baltic, sailing past warships and groups of idle yachts battened down for their winter's sleep; while the noble shores of the fiord, with its villas embowered in copper foliage, grew dark and dim above us.

We rounded the last headland, steered for a galaxy of coloured lights, tumbled down our sails, and came to under the colossal gates of the Holtenau lock. That these would open to such an infinitesimal suppliant seemed inconceivable. But open they did, with ponderous majesty, and our tiny hull was lost in the womb of a lock designed to float the largest battleships. I thought of Boulter's on a hot August Sunday, and wondered if I really was the same peevish dandy who had jostled and sweltered there with the noisy cockney throng a month ago. There was a blaze of electricity overhead, but utter silence till a solitary cloaked figure hailed us and called for the captain. Davies ran up a ladder, disappeared with the cloaked figure, and returned crumpling a paper into his pocket. It lies before me now, and sets forth, under the stamp of the Königliches Zollamt, that, in consideration of the sum of ten marks for dues and four for tonnage, an imperial tug would tow the vessel *Dulcibella* (master A. H. Davies) through the Kaiser Wilhelm Canal from Holtenau to Brunsbüttel. Magnificent condescension! I blush when I look at this yellow document and remember the stately courtesy of the great lock gates; for the sleepy officials of the Königliches Zollamt little knew what an insidious little viper they were admitting into the imperial bosom at the light toll of fourteen shillings.

"Seems cheap," said Davies, joining me, "doesn't it? They've a regular tariff on tonnage, same for yachts as for liners. We start at four to-morrow with a lot of other boats. I wonder if Bartels is here."

The same silence reigned, but invisible forces were at work. The inner gates opened and we prised ourselves through into a capacious basin, where lay moored side by side a flotilla of sailing vessels of various sizes. Having made fast alongside a vacant space of quay, we had our dinner, and then strolled out with cigars to look for the *Johannes*. We found her wedged among a stack of galliots, and her skipper sitting primly below before a blazing stove, reading his Bible through

spectacles. He produced a bottle of schnapps and some very small and hard pears, while Davies twitted him mercilessly about his false predictions.

"The sky was not good," was all he said, beaming indulgently at his incorrigible young friend.

Before parting for the night it was arranged that next morning we should lash alongside the *Johannes* when the flotilla was marshalled for the tow through the canal.

"Karl shall steer for us both," he said, "and we will stay warm in the cabin."

The scheme was carried out, not without much confusion and loss of paint, in the small hours of a dark and drizzling morning. Boisterous little tugs sorted us into parties, and half lost under the massive bulwarks of the *Johannes* we were carried off into a black inane. If any doubt remained as to the significance of our change of cruising-grounds, dawn dispelled it. View there was none from the deck of the *Dulcibella;* it was only by standing on the mainboom that you could see over the embankments to the vast plain of Holstein, grey and monotonous under a pall of mist. The soft scenery of the Schleswig coast was a baseless dream of the past, and a cold penetrating rain added the last touch of dramatic completeness to the staging of the new act.

For two days we travelled slowly up the mighty waterway that is the strategic link between the two seas of Germany. Broad and straight, massively embanked, lit by electricity at night till it is lighter than many a great London street; traversed by great war vessels, rich merchantmen, and humble coasters alike, it is a symbol of the new and mighty force which, controlled by the genius of statesmen and engineers, is thrusting the empire irresistibly forward to the goal of maritime greatness.

"Isn't it splendid?" said Davies. "He's a fine fellow, that emperor."

Karl was the shock-headed, stout-limbed boy of about sixteen, who constituted the whole crew of the *Johannes*, and was as dirty as his master was clean. I felt a certain envious reverence for this unprepossessing youth, seeing in him a much more efficient counterpart of myself; but how he and his little master ever managed to work their ungainly vessel was a miracle I never understood. Phlegmatically impervious to rain and cold, he steered the *Johannes* down the long grey reaches in the wake of the tug, while we and Bartels held snug gatherings down below, sometimes in his cabin, sometimes in ours. The heating arrangements of the latter began to be a subject of serious concern. We finally did the only logical thing, and brought the kitchen-range into the parlour, fixing the Rippingille stove on the forward end of the cabin table, where it could warm as well as cook for us. As an ornament it was monstrous, and the taint of oil which it introduced was a disgusting drawback; but, after all, the great thing — as Davies said—is to be comfortable, and after that to be clean.

Davies held long consultations with Bartels, who was thoroughly at home in the navigation of the sands we were bound for, his own boat being a type of the very craft which ply in them. I shall not forget the moment when it first dawned on him that his young friend's curiosity was practical; for he had thought that our goal was his own beloved Hamburg, queen of cities, a place to see and die.

"It is too late," he wailed. "You do not know the Nord See as I do."

"Oh, nonsense, Bartels, it's quite safe."

"Safe! And have I not found you fast on Hohenhörn, in a storm, with your rudder broken? God was good to you then, my son."

"Yes, but it wasn't my f——" Davies checked himself. "We're going home. There's nothing in that." Bartels became sadly resigned.

"It is good that you have a friend," was his last word on the subject; but all the same he always glanced at me with a rather doubtful eye. As to Davies and myself, our friendship developed quickly on certain limited lines, the chief obstacle, as I well know now, being his reluctance to talk about the personal side of our quest.

On the other hand I spoke about my own life and interests, with an unsparing discernment, of which I should have

been incapable a month ago, and in return I gained the key to his own character. It was devotion to the sea, wedded to a fire of pent-up patriotism struggling incessantly for an outlet in strenuous physical expression; a humility, born of acute sensitiveness to his own limitations, only adding fuel to the flame. I learnt for the first time now that in early youth he had failed for the navy, the first of several failures in his career. "And I can't settle down to anything else," he said. "I read no end about it, and yet I am a useless outsider. All I've been able to do is to potter about in small boats; but it's all been *wasted* till this chance came. I'm afraid you'll not understand how I feel about it; but at last, for once in a way, I see a chance of being useful."

"There ought to be chances for chaps like you," I said, "without the accident of a job such as this."

"Oh, as long as I get it, what matter? But I know what you mean. There must be hundreds of chaps like me—I know a good many myself—who know our coasts like a book—shoals, creeks, tides, rocks; there's nothing in it, it's only practice. They ought to make some use of us as a naval reserve. They tried to once, but it fizzled out, and nobody really cares. And what's the result? Using every man of what reserves we've got, there's about enough to man the fleet on a war footing, and no more. They've tinkered with fishermen, and merchant sailors, and yachting hands, but everyone of them ought to be got hold of; and the colonies, too. Is there the ghost of a doubt that if war broke out there'd be wild appeals for volunteers, aimless cadging, hurry, confusion, waste? My own idea is that we ought to go much further, and train every able-bodied man for a couple of years as a sailor. Army? Oh, I suppose you'd have to give them the choice. Not that I know or care much about the Army, though to listen to people talk you'd think it really mattered as the Navy matters. We're a maritime nation—we've grown by the sea and live by it; if we lose command of it we starve. We're unique in that way, just as our huge empire, only linked by the sea is unique. And yet, read Brassey, Dilke, and those 'Naval Annuals,' and see what mountains of apathy and conceit have had to be tackled. It's not the people's fault. We've been safe so long, and grown so rich, that we've forgotten what we owe it to. But there's no excuse for those blockheads of statesmen, as they call themselves, who are paid to see things as they are. They have to go to an American to learn their A B C, and it's only when kicked and punched by civilian agitators, a mere handful of men who get sneered at for their pains, that they wake up, do some work, point proudly to it, and go to sleep again, till they get another kick. By Jove! we want a man like this Kaiser, who doesn't wait to be kicked, but works like a nigger for his country, and sees ahead."

"We're improving, aren't we?"

"Oh, of course, we are! But it's a constant uphill fight; and we aren't ready. They talk of a two-power standard——" He plunged away into regions where space forbids me to follow him. This is only a sample of many similar conversations that we afterwards held, always culminating in the burning question of Germany. Far from including me and the Foreign Office among his targets for vague invective, he had a profound respect for my sagacity and experience as a member of that institution; a respect which embarrassed me not a little when I thought of my *précis* writing and cigarette-smoking, my dancing, and my dining. But I did know something of Germany, and could satisfy his tireless questioning with a certain authority. He used to listen rapt while I described her marvellous awakening in the last generation, under the strength and wisdom of her rulers; her intense patriotic ardour; her seething industrial activity, and, most potent of all, the forces that are moulding modern Europe, her dream of a colonial empire, entailing her transformation from a land-power to a sea-power. Impregnably based on vast territorial resources which we cannot molest, the dim instincts of her people not merely directed but anticipated by the genius of her ruling house, our great trade rival of the present, our great naval rival of the

future, she grows, and strengthens, and waits, an ever more formidable factor in the future of our delicate network of empire, sensitive as gossamer to external shocks, and radiating from an island whose commerce is its life, and which depends even for its daily ration of bread on the free passage of the seas.

"And we aren't ready for her," Davies would say; "we don't look her way. We have no naval base in the North Sea, and no North Sea Fleet. Our best battleships are too deep in draught for North Sea work. And, to crown all, we were asses enough to give her Heligoland, which commands her North Sea coast. And supposing she collars Holland; isn't there some talk of that?"

That would lead me to describe the swollen ambitions of the Pan-Germanic party, and its ceaseless intrigues to promote the absorption of Austria, Switzerland, and—a direct and flagrant menace to ourselves—of Holland.

"I don't blame them," said Davies, who, for all his patriotism, had not a particle of racial spleen in his composition. "I don't blame them; their Rhine ceases to be German just when it begins to be most valuable. The mouth is Dutch, and would give them magnificent ports just opposite British shores. *We* can't talk about conquest and grabbing. We've collared a fine share of the world, and they've every right to be jealous. Let them hate us, and say so; it'll teach us to buck up; and that's what really matters."

In these talks there occurred a singular contact of minds. It was very well for me to spin sonorous generalities, but I had never till now dreamed of being so vulgar as to translate them into practice. I had always detested the meddlesome alarmist, who veils ignorance under noisiness, and for ever wails his chant of lugubrious pessimism. To be thrown with Davies was to receive a shock of enlightenment; for here, at least, was a specimen of the breed who exacted respect. It is true he made use of the usual jargon, interlarding his stammering sentences (sometimes, when he was excited, with the oddest effect) with the conventional catchwords of the journalist and platform speaker. But these were but accidents; for he seemed to have caught his innermost conviction from the very soul of the sea itself. An arm-chair critic is one thing, but a sun-burnt, brine-burnt zealot smarting under a personal discontent, athirst for a means, however tortuous, of contributing his effort to the great cause, the maritime supremacy of Britain, that was quite another thing. He drew inspiration from the very wind and spray. He communed with his tiller, I believe, and marshalled his figures with its help. To hear him talk was to feel a current of clarifying air blustering into a close club-room, where men bandy ineffectual platitudes, and mumble old shibboleths, and go away and do nothing.

In our talk about policy and strategy we were Bismarcks and Rodneys, wielding nations and navies; and, indeed, I have no doubt that our fancy took extravagant flights sometimes. In plain fact we were merely two young gentlemen in a seven-ton pleasure boat, with a taste for amateur hydrography and police duty combined. Not that Davies ever doubted. Once set on the road he gripped his purpose with child-like faith and tenacity. It was his "chance."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE PATHFINDERS

In the late afternoon of the second day our flotilla reached the Elbe at Brunsbüttel and ranged up in the inner basin, while a big liner, whimpering like a fretful baby, was tenderly nursed into the lock. During the delay Davies left me in charge, and bolted off with an oil-can and a milk jug. An official in uniform was passing along the quay from vessel to vessel countersigning papers. I went up to meet him with our receipt for dues, which he signed

carelessly. Then he paused and muttered "*Dooltzhibella*," scratching his head, "that was the name. English?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Little *lust-cutter*, that is so; there was an inquiry for you."

"Whom from?"

"A friend of yours from a big barge-yacht."

"Oh, I know; she went on to Hamburg, I suppose?"

"No such luck, captain; she was outward bound."

What did the man mean? He seemed to be vastly amused by something.

"When was this—about three weeks ago?" I asked, indifferently.

"Three weeks? It was the day before yesterday."

"What a pity to miss him by so little!" He chuckled and winked.

"Did he leave any message?" I asked.

"It was a lady who inquired," whispered the fellow, sniggering.

"Oh, really," I said, beginning to feel highly absurd, but keenly curious. "And she inquired about the *Dulcibella?*"

"Herrgott! she was difficult to satisfy! Stood over me while I searched the books. 'A very little one,' she kept saying, and 'Are you sure all the names are here?' I saw her into her kleine Boot, and she rowed away in the rain. No, she left no message. It was dirty weather for a young fräulein to be out alone in. Ach! she was safe enough, though. To see her crossing the ebb in a chop of tide was a treat."

"And the yacht went on down the river? Where was she bound to?"

"How do I know? Bremen, Wilhelmshaven, Emden—somewhere in the North Sea; too far for you."

"I don't know about that," said I, bravely.

"Ach! you will not follow in *that?* Are not you bound to Hamburg?"

"We can change our plans. It seems a pity to have missed them."

"Think twice, captain, there are plenty of pretty girls in Hamburg. But you English will do anything. Well, viel Glück!"

He moved on, chuckling, to the next boat. Davies soon returned with his cans and an armful of dark, rye loaves, just in time, for, the liner being through, the flotilla was already beginning to jostle into the lock, and Bartels was growing impatient.

"They'll last ten days," he said, as we followed the throng, still clinging like a barnacle to the side of the *Johannes*. We spent the few minutes while the lock was emptied in a farewell talk to Bartels. Karl had hitched their main halyards on to the windlass and was grinding at it in an *acharnement* of industry, his shock head jerking and his grubby face perspiring. Then the lock gates opened; and so, in a Babel of shouting, whining of blocks, and creaking of spars, our whole company was split out into the dingy bosom of the Elbe. The *Johannes* gathered way under wind and tide and headed for midstream. A last shake of the hand, and Bartels reluctantly slipped the head-rope and we drifted apart. "Gute Reise! Gute Reise!" It was no time for regretful gazing, for the flood-tide was sweeping us up and out, and it was not until we had set the foresail, edged into a shallow bight, and let go our anchor, that we had leisure to think of him again; but by that time his and the other craft were shades in the murky east.

We swung close to a *glacis* of smooth blue mud which sloped up to a weed-grown dyke; behind lay the same flat country, colourless, humid; and opposite us, two miles away, scarcely visible in the deepening twilight, ran the outline of a similar shore. Between rolled the turgid Elbe. "The Styx flowing through Tartarus," I thought to myself, recalling some of our Baltic anchorages.

I told my news to Davies as soon as the anchor was down, instinctively leaving the sex of the inquirer to the last, as my informant had done.

"The *Medusa* called yesterday?" he interrupted. "And outward bound? That's a rum thing. Why didn't he inquire when he was going *up?*"

"It was a lady," and I drily retailed the official's story, very busy with a deck-broom the while. "We're all square now, aren't we?" I ended. "I'll go below and light the stove."

Davies had been engaged in fixing up the riding-light. When I last saw him

he was still so engaged, but motionless, the lantern under his left arm, and his right hand grasping the fore-stay and the half-knotted lanyard; his eyes staring fixedly down the river, a strange look in his face, half exultant, half perplexed. When he joined me and spoke he seemed to be concluding a difficult argument.

"Anyway, it proves," he said, "that the *Medusa* has gone back to Norderney. That's the main thing."

"Probably," I agreed, "but let's sum up all we know. First, it's certain that nobody we've met as yet has any suspicion of *us*——"

"I told you he did it off his own bat," threw in Davies.

"Or, secondly, of *him*. If he's what you think it's not known here."

"I can't help that."

"Thirdly, he inquires for you on his way *back* from Hamburg, three weeks after the event. It doesn't look as if he thought he had disposed of you—it doesn't look as if he had *meant* to dispose of you. He sends his daughter, too—a curious proceeding under the circumstances. Perhaps it's all a mistake."

"It's not a mistake," said Davies, half to himself. "But *did* he send her? He'd have sent one of his men. He can't be on board at all."

This was a new light.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"He must have left the yacht when he got to Hamburg; some other devil's work, I suppose. She's being sailed back now, and passing here——"

"Oh, I see! It's a private supplementary inquiry."

"That's a long name to call it."

"Would the girl sail back alone with the crew?"

"She's used to the sea—and perhaps she isn't alone. There was that stepmother—— But it doesn't make a ha'porth of difference to our plans; we'll start on the ebb to-morrow morning."

We were busier than usual that night, reckoning stores, tidying lockers, and securing movables. "We must economise," said Davies, for all the world as though we were castaways on a raft. "It's a wretched thing to have to land somewhere to buy oil," was a favourite observation of his.

Before getting to sleep I was made to recognise a new factor in the conditions of navigation, now that the tideless Baltic was left behind us. A strong current was sluicing past our sides, and at the eleventh hour I was turned out, clad in pyjamas and oilskins (a horrible combination), to assist in running out a kedge or spare anchor.

"What's kedging off?" I asked, when we were tucked up again.

"Oh, it's when you run aground; you have to—but you'll soon learn all about it." I steeled my heart for the morrow.

So behold us, then, at eight o'clock on October 5th, standing down the river towards the field of our first labours. It is fifteen miles to the mouth; drab, dreary miles like the dullest reaches of the lower Thames; but scenery was of no concern to us, and a south-westerly breeze blowing out of a grey sky kept us constantly on the verge of reefing. The tide as it gathered strength swept us down with a force attested by the speed with which buoys came in sight, nodded above us and passed, each boiling in its eddy of dirty foam. I scarcely noticed at first—so calm was the water, and so regular were the buoys, like milestones along a road—that the northern line of coast was rapidly receding and that the "river" was coming to be but a belt of deep water skirting a vast estuary, three—seven—ten miles broad, till it merged in open sea.

"Why, we're at sea!" I suddenly exclaimed, "after an hour's sailing!"

"Just discovered that?" said Davies, laughing.

"You said it was fifteen miles," I complained.

"So it is, till we reach this coast at Cuxhaven; but I suppose you may say we're at sea; of course that's all sand over there to starboard. Look! some of it's showing already."

He pointed into the north. Looking more attentively I noticed that outside the line of buoys patches of the surface heaved and worked; in one or two places streaks and circles of white were forming; in the midst of one such circle a sleek mauve hump had risen, like the back of a sleeping whale. I saw that an old spell was enthralling Davies as his eye travelled away to the blank horizon. He scanned it all with a critical eager-

ness, too, as one who looks for a new meaning in an old friend's face. Something of his zest was communicated to me, and stilled the shuddering thrill that had seized me. The protecting land was still a comforting neighbour; but our severance with it came quickly. The tide whirled us down, and, our straining canvas aiding it, we were soon off Cuxhaven, which crouched so low behind its mighty dyke, that of some of its houses only the chimneys were visible. Then, a mile or so on, the shore sharpened to a point like a claw, where the innocent dyke became a long, low fort, with some great guns peeping over; then of a sudden it ceased, retreating into the far south in a dim perspective of groins and dunes.

We spun out into the open and leant heavily over to the now unobstructed wind. The yacht rose and sank to a little swell, but my first impression was one of wonder at the calmness of the sea, for the wind blew fresh and free from horizon to horizon.

"Why, it's all sand *there* now, and we're under the lee of it," said Davies, with an enthusiastic sweep of his hand over the sea on our left, or port, hand. "That's our hunting ground."

"What are we going to do?" I inquired.

"Pick up Sticker's Gat," was the reply. "It ought to be near Buoy K."

A red buoy with a huge K on it soon came into view. Davies peered over to port.

"Just pull up the centre-board, will you?" he remarked, abstractedly, adding, "and hand me up the glasses as you're down there."

"Never mind the glasses. I've got it now; come to the main-sheet," was the next remark.

He put down the helm and headed the yacht straight for the troubled and discoloured expanse which covered the submerged sands. A "sleeping whale," with a light surf splashing on it, was right in our path.

"Stand by the lead, will you?" said Davies, politely. "I'll manage the sheets. it's a dead beat in. Ready about!"

The wind was in our teeth now, and for a crowded half-hour we wormed ourselves forward by ever-shortening tacks into the sinuous recesses of a channel which threaded the shallows westward. I knelt in a tangle of line, and, under the hazy impression that something very critical was going on, plied the lead furiously, bumping and splashing myself, and shouting out the depths, which lessened steadily, with a great sense of the importance of my function. Davies never seemed to listen, but tacked on imperturbably, juggling with the tiller, the sheets, and the chart, in a way that made one giddy to look at. For all our zeal we seemed to be making very slow progress.

"It's no use, tide's too strong; we must chance it," he said at last.

"Chance what?" I wondered to myself. Our tacks suddenly began to grow longer, and the depths, which I registered, shallower. All went well for some time though, and we made better progress. Then came a longer reach than usual.

"Two and a half—two—one and a half—one—only five feet," I gasped, reproachfully. The water was growing thick and frothy.

"It doesn't matter if we do," said Davies, thinking aloud. "There's an eddy here, and it's a pity to waste it—ready about! Back the jib!"

But it was too late. The yacht answered but faintly to the helm, stopped and heeled heavily over, wallowing and grinding. Davies had the mainsail down in a twinkling; it half smothered me as I crouched on the lee-side among my tangled skeins of line, scared and helpless. I crawled out from the folds, and saw him standing by the mast in a reverie.

"It's not much use," he said, "on a falling tide, but we'll try kedging off. Pay that warp out while I run out the kedge."

Like lightning he had cast off the dinghy's painter, tumbled the kedge-anchor and himself into the dinghy, pulled out fifty yards into the deeper water, and heaved out the anchor.

"Now haul," he shouted.

I hauled, beginning to see what kedging-off meant.

"Steady on! Don't sweat yourself," said Davies, jumping aboard again.

"It's coming," I spluttered, triumphantly.

"The warp is, the yacht isn't; you're dragging the anchor home. Never mind, she'll lie well here. Let's have lunch."

The yacht was motionless, and the water round her visibly lower. Petulant waves slapped against her sides, but, scattered as my senses were, I realised that there was no vestige of danger. Round us the whole face of the waters was changing from moment to moment, whitening in some places, yellowing in others, where breadths of sand began to be exposed. Close on our right the channel we had left began to look like a turbid little river; and I understood why our progress had been so slow when I saw its current racing back to meet the Elbe. Davies was already below, laying out a more than usually elaborate lunch, in high content of mind.

"Lies quiet, doesn't she?" he remarked. "If you *do* want a sit-down lunch, there's nothing like running aground for it. And, anyhow, we're as handy for work here as anywhere else. You'll see."

Like most landsmen I had a wholesome prejudice against "running aground," so that my mentor's turn for breezy paradox was at first rather exasperating. After lunch the large scale chart of the estuaries was brought down, and we pored over it together, mapping out work for the next few days. There is no need to tire the general reader with its intricacies, nor is there space to reproduce it for the benefit of the instructed reader. For both classes the general map should be sufficient, taken with the large scale fragment (Chart A), which gives a fair example of the region in detail. It will be seen that the three broad fairways of the Jade, Weser, and Elbe, split up the sands into two main groups. The westernmost of these is symmetrical in outline, an acute-angled triangle, very like a sharp steel-shod pike, if you imagine the peninsula from which it springs to be the wooden haft. The other is a huge congeries of banks, its base resting on the Hanover coast, two of its sides tolerably clean and even, and the third, that facing the north-west, ribboned and lacerated by the fury of the sea, which has eaten out deep cavities and struck hungry tentacles far into the interior. The whole resembles an inverted E, or, better still, a rude fork, on whose three deadly prongs, the Scharhorn Reef, the Knecht Sand, and the Tegeler Flat, as on the no less deadly point of the pike, many a good ship splinters herself in northerly gales. Following this simile, the Hohenhörn bank, where Davies was wrecked, is one of those that lie between the upper and middle prongs.

Our business was to explore the Pike and the Fork, and the channels which ramify through them. I use the general word "channel," but in fact they differ widely in character, and are called in German by various names: Balje, Gat, Loch, Diep, Rinne. For my purpose I need only divide them into two sorts—those which have water in them at all states of the tide, and those which have not, which dry off, that is, either wholly or partly at low-tide.

Davies explained that the latter would take most learning, and were to be our chief concern, because they were the "through-routes"—the connecting links between the estuaries. You can always detect them on the chart by rows of little Y-shaped strokes denoting "booms," that is to say, poles or saplings fixed in the sand to mark the passage. The strokes, of course, are only conventional signs, and do not correspond in the least to individual "booms," which are far too numerous and complex to be indicated accurately on a chart, even of the largest scale. The same applies to the course of the channels themselves, whose minor meanderings cannot be reproduced.

It was on the edge of one of these tidal swatchways that the yacht was now lying. It is called Sticker's Gat, and you cannot miss it (Chart A) if you carry your eye westward along our course from Cuxhaven. It was, so Davies told me, the last and most intricate stage of the "short cut" which the *Medusa* had taken on that memorable day—a stage he himself had never reached. Discussion ended, we went on deck, Davies arming himself with a notebook, binoculars, and the prismatic compass, whose use—to map the angles of the channels—was at last apparent. This is what I saw when we emerged.

CHAPTER TWELVE

MY INITIATION

THE yacht lay with a very slight heel (thanks to a pair of small bilge-keels on her bottom) in a sort of trough she had dug for herself, so that she was still ringed with a few inches of water, as it were with a moat.

For miles in every direction lay a desert of sand. To the north it touched the horizon, and was only broken by the blue dot of Neuerk Island and its lighthouse. To the east it seemed also to stretch to infinity, but the smoke of a steamer showed where it was pierced by the stream of the Elbe. To the south it ran up to the pencil-line of the Hanover shore. Only to the west was its outline broken by any vestiges of the sea it had risen from. There it was astir with crawling white filaments, knotted confusedly at one spot in the north-west, whence came a sibilant murmur like the hissing of many snakes. Desert as I call it, it was not entirely featureless. Its colour varied from light fawn, where the highest levels had dried in the wind, to brown or deep violet, where it was still wet, and slate-grey where patches of mud soiled its clean bosom. Here and there were pools of water, smitten into ripples by the impotent wind; here and there it was speckled by shells and seaweed. And close to us, beginning to bend away towards that hissing knot in the north-west, wound our poor little channel, mercilessly exposed as a stagnant, muddy ditch with scarcely a foot of water, not deep enough to hide our small kedge-anchor, which perked up one fluke in impudent mockery. The dull, hard sky, the wind moaning in the rigging as though crying in despair for a prey that had escaped it, made the scene inexpressibly forlorn.

Davies scanned it with gusto for a moment, climbed to a point of vantage on the boom, and swept his glasses to and fro along the course of the channel.

"Fairly well boomed," he said, meditatively, "but one or two are very much out. By Jove! that's a tricky bend there." He took a bearing with the compass, made a note or two, and sprang with a vigorous leap down on to the sand.

This, I may say, was the only way of "going ashore" that he really liked. We raced off as fast as our clumsy sea-boots would let us, and followed up the course of our channel to the west, reconnoitring the road we should have to follow when the tide rose.

"The only way to learn a place like this," he shouted, "is to see it at low water. The banks are dry then, and the channels are plain. Look at that boom"—he stopped and pointed contemptuously—"it's all out of place. I suppose the channel's shifted there. It's just at an important bend, too. If you took it as a guide when the water was up you'd run aground."

"Which would be very useful," I observed.

"Oh, hang it!" he laughed, "we're exploring. I want to be able to run through this channel without a mistake. We will, next time." He stopped, and plied compass and notebook. Then we raced on till the next halt was called.

"Look," he said, "the channel's getting deeper, it was nearly dry a moment ago; see the current in it now? That's the flood tide coming up—from the *west*, mind you; that is, from the Weser side. That shows we're past the watershed."

"Watershed?" I repeated, blankly.

"Yes, that's what I call it. You see, a big sand such as this is like a range of hills dividing two plains, it's never dead flat though it looks it; there's always one point, one ridge, rather, where it's highest. Now a channel cutting right through the sand is, of course, always at its shallowest when it's crossing this ridge; at low water it's generally dry there, and it gradually deepens as it gets nearer to the sea on either side. Now, at high tide, when the whole sand is covered, the water can travel where it likes; but directly the ebb sets in the water falls away on either side the ridge and the channel becomes two rivers flowing in opposite directions *from* the centre, or watershed, as I call it. So, also, when the ebb has run out and the flood begins, the channel is fed by two currents flowing *to* the centre and meeting in the middle. Here the

Elbe and the Weser are our two feeders. Now this current here is going eastward; we know by the time of day that the tide's rising, *therefore* the watershed is between us and the yacht."

"Why is it so important to know that?"

"Because these currents are strong, and you want to know when you'll lose a fair one and strike a foul one. Besides, the ridge is the critical point when you're crossing on a falling tide, and you want to know when you're past it."

We pushed on till our path was barred by a big lagoon. It looked far more imposing than the channel; but Davies, after a rapid scrutiny, treated it to a grunt of contempt.

"It's a *cul de sac*," he said. "See that hump of sand it's making for, beyond?"

"It's boomed," I remonstrated, pointing to a decrepit stem drooping over the bank, and shaking a palsied finger at the imposture.

"Yes, that's just where one goes wrong, it's an old cut that's silted up. That boom's a fraud; there's no time to go further, the flood's making fast. I'll just take bearings of what we can see."

The false lagoon was the first of several that began to be visible in the west, swelling and joining hands over the ribs of sand that divided them. All the time the distant hissing grew nearer and louder, and a deep, thunderous note began to sound beneath it. We turned our backs to the wind and hastened back towards the *Dulcibella*, the stream in our channel hurrying and rising alongside of us.

"There's just time to do the other side," said Davies, when we reached her, and I was congratulating myself on having regained our base without finding our communications cut. And away we scurried in the direction we had come that morning, splashing through pools and jumping the infant runnels that were stealing out through rifts from the mother-channel as the tide rose. Our observations completed, back we travelled, making a wide circuit over higher ground to avoid the encroaching flood, and wading shin-deep in the final approach to the yacht.

As I scrambled thankfully aboard, I seemed to hear a far-off voice saying, in languid depreciation of yachting, that it did not give one enough exercise. It was mine, centuries ago, in another life. From east and west two sheets of water had overspread the desert, each pushing out tongues of surf that met and fused.

I waited on deck and watched the death-throes of the suffocating sands under the relentless onset of the sea. The last strongholds were battered, stormed, and overwhelmed; the tumult of sounds sank and steadied, and the sea swept victoriously over the whole expanse. The *Dulcibella*, hitherto contemptuously inert, began to wake and tremble under the buffetings she received. Then, with an effort, she jerked herself on to an even keel and bumped and strained fretfully, impatient to vanquish this insolent invader and make him a slave for her own ends. Soon her warp tightened and her nose swung slowly round; only her stern bumped now, and that with decreasing force. Suddenly she was free and drifting broadside to the wind till the anchor checked her and she brought up to leeward of it, rocking easily and triumphantly. Good-humoured little person! At heart she was friends alike with sand and sea. It was only when the old love and the new love were in mortal combat for her favours, and she was mauled in the *fracas*, that her temper rose in revolt.

We swallowed a hasty cup of tea, ran up the sails, and started off west again. Once across the "watershed" we met a strong current, but the trend of the passage was now more to the north-west, so that we could hold our course without tacking, and consequently could stem the tide. "Give her just a foot of the centre-plate," said Davies. "We know the way here, and she'll make less leeway; but we shall generally have to do without it—always on a falling tide. If you run aground with the plate down you deserve to be drowned." I now saw how valuable our walk had been. The booms were on our right; but they were broken reeds, giving no hint as to the breadth of the channel. A few had lost their tops and were being engulfed altogether by the rising water. When we came to the point where they ceased,

and the false lagoon had lain, I should have felt utterly lost. We had crossed the high and relatively level sands which form the base of the Fork, and were entering the labyrinth of detached banks which obstruct the funnel-shaped cavity between the upper and middle prongs. This I knew from the chart. My unaided eye saw nothing but the open sea, growing dark green as the depths increased; a dour, threatening sea, showing its white fangs. The waves grew longer and steeper, for the channels, though still tortuous, now begin to be broad and deep.

Davies had his bearings, and struck on his course confidently. "Now for the lead," he said; "the compass'll be little use soon. We must feel the edge of the sands till we pick up more booms."

"Where are we going to anchor for the night?" I asked.

"Under the Hohenhörn," said Davies, "for auld lang syne!"

Partly by sight and mostly by touch we crept round the outermost alley of the hidden maze till a new clump of booms appeared, meaningless to me, but analysed by him into two groups. One we followed for some distance, and then struck finally away and began another beat to windward.

Dusk was falling. The Hanover coast-line, never very distinct, had utterly vanished; an ominous heave of swell was underrunning the short sea. I ceased to attend to Davies imparting instruction on his beloved hobby, and sought to stifle in hard manual labour the dread that had been latent in me all day at the prospect of our first anchorage at sea.

"Sound, like blazes now!" he said at last. I came to a fathom and a half. "That's the bank," he said; "we'll give it a bit of a berth and then let go."

"Let go now!" was the order after a minute, and the chain ran out with a long-drawn moan. The *Dulcibella* snubbed up to it and jauntily faced the North Sea and the growing night.

"There we are!" said Davies, as we finished stowing the mainsail, "safe and snug in four fathoms in a magnificent sand-harbour, with no one to bother us and the whole of it to ourselves. No dues, no stinks, no traffic, no worries of any sort. It's better than a Baltic cove even, less beastly civilisation about. We're seven miles from the nearest coast, and five even from Neuerk — look, they're lighting up." There was a tiny spark in the east.

"I suppose it's all right," I said, "but I'd rather see a solid breakwater somewhere; it's a dirty-looking night, and I don't like this swell."

"The swell's nothing," said Davies; "it's only a stray drain from outside. As for breakwaters, you've got them all round you, only they're hidden. Ahead and to starboard is the West Hohenhörn, curling round to the sou'-west for all the world like a stone pier. You can hear the surf battering on its outside over to the north. That's where I was nearly wrecked that day, and the little channel I stumbled into must be quite near us somewhere. Half a mile away—to port there—is the East Hohenhörn, where I brought up, after dashing across this lake we're in. Another mile astern is the main body of the sands, the top prong of your fork. So you see we're shut in—practically. Surely you remember the chart? Why, it's——"

"Oh, confound the chart!" I broke out, finding this flow of plausible comfort too dismally suggestive for my nerves. "*Look* at it, man! Supposing anything happens—supposing it blows a gale! But it's no good shivering here and staring at the view. I'm going below."

There was a *mauvais quart d'heure* below, during which, I am ashamed to say, that I forgot the quest.

"Which soup do you feel inclined for?" said Davies, timidly, after a black silence of some minutes.

That simple remark, more eloquent of security than a thousand technical arguments, saved the situation.

"I say, Davies," I said, "I'm a white-livered cur at the best, and you mustn't spare me. But you're not like any yachtsman I ever met before, or any sailor of any sort. You're so casual and quiet in the extraordinary things you do. I believe I should like you better if you let fly a volley of deep-sea oaths sometimes, or threatened to put me inirons."

Davies opened wide eyes, and said it was all his fault for forgetting that I was not as used to such anchorages as he was. "And, by the way," he added,

"as to its blowing a gale, I shouldn't wonder if it did; the glass is falling hard; but it can't hurt us. You see, even at high water the drift of the sea——"

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, don't begin again. You'll prove soon that we're safer here than in an hotel. Let's have dinner, and a thundering good one!"

Dinner ran a smooth course, but just as coffee was being brewed the hull, from pitching regularly, began to roll.

"I knew she would," said Davies. "I was going to warn you, only—the ebb has set in *against* the wind. It's quite safe——"

"I thought you said it would get calmer when the tide fell?"

"So it will, but it may *seem* rougher. Tides are queer things," he added, as though in defence of some not very respectable acquaintances.

He busied himself with his logbook, swaying easily to the motion of the boat; and I for my part tried to write up my diary, but I could not fix my attention. Every loose article in the boat became audibly restless. Cans clinked, cupboards rattled, lockers uttered hollow groans. Small things sidled out of dark hiding-places, and danced grotesque drunken figures on the floor, like goblins in a haunted glade. The mast whined dolorously at every heel, and the centre-board hiccoughed and choked. Overhead another horde of demons seemed to have been let loose. The deck and mast were conductors which magnified every sound and made the tap-tap of every rope's end resemble the blows of a hammer, and the slapping of the halyards against the mast the rattle of a Maxim gun. The whole tumult beat time to a rhythmical chorus which became maddening.

"We might turn in now," said Davies; "it's half-past ten."

"What, sleep through this?" I exclaimed. "I can't stand this, I must *do* something. Can't we go for another walk?"

I spoke in bitter, half-delirious jest.

"Of course we can," said Davies, "if you don't mind a bit of a tumble in the dinghy."

I reconsidered my rash suggestion, but it was too late now to turn back, and some desperate expedient was necessary. I found myself on deck, gripping a backstay and looking giddily down and then up at the dinghy, as it bobbed like a cork in the trough of the sea alongside, while Davies settled the sculls and rowlocks.

"Jump!" he shouted, and before I could gather my wits and clutch the sides we were adrift in the night, reeling from hollow to hollow of the steep curling waves. Davies nursed our walnut-shell tenderly over their crests, edging her slantwise across their course. He used very little exertion, relying on the tide to carry us to our goal. Suddenly the motion ceased. A dark slope loomed up out of the night, and the dinghy rested softly in a shallow eddy.

"The West Hohenhörn," said Davies. We jumped out and sank into soft mud, hauled up the dinghy a foot or two, then mounted the bank and were on hard, wet sand. The wind leapt on us, and choked our voices.

"Let's find my channel," bawled Davies. "This way. Keep Neuerk light right astern of you."

We set off with a long, stooping stride in the teeth of the wind, and straight towards the roar of the breakers on the farther side of the sand. A line of Matthew Arnold's: "The naked shingles of the world," was running in my head. "Seven miles from land," I thought, "scuttling like sea birds on a transient islet of sand, encircled by rushing tides and hammered by ocean, at midnight in a rising gale—cut off even from our one dubious refuge." It was the time, if ever, to conquer weakness. A mad gaiety surged through me as I drank the wind and pressed forward. It seemed but a minute or two and Davies clutched me.

"Look out!" he shouted. "It's my channel."

The ground sloped down, and a rushing river glimmered before us. We struck off at a tangent and followed its course to the north, stumbling in muddy rifts, slipping on seaweed, beginning to be blinded by a fine salt spray, and deafened by the thunder of the ocean surf. The river broadened, whitened, roughened, gathered itself for the shock, was shattered, and dissolved in milky gloom. We wheeled away to

the right, and splashed into yeasty froth. I turned my back to the wind, scooped the brine out of eyes, faced back and saw that our path was barred by a welter of surf. Davies's voice was in my ear and his arm was pointing seaward.

"This — is — about where — I — bumped first—worse then—nor'-west wind—this—is—nothing. Let's—go—right—round."

We galloped away with the wind behind us, skirting the line of surf. I lost all account of time and direction. Another sea barred our road, became another river as we slanted along its shore. Again we were in the teeth of that intoxicating wind. Then a point of light was swaying and flickering away to the left, and now we were checking and circling. I stumbled against something sharp—the dinghy's gunwale. So we had completed the circuit of our fugitive domain, that dream-island—nightmare island as I always remember it.

"You must scull, too," said Davies. "It's blowing hard now. Keep her nose *up* a little—all you know!"

We lurched along, my scull sometimes buried to the thwart, sometimes striking at the bubbles of a wave top. Davies, in the bows, said "Pull!" or "Steady!" at intervals. I heard the scud smacking against his oilskin back. Then a wan, yellow light glanced over the waves. "Easy! Let her come!" and the bowsprit of the *Dulcibella*, swollen to spectral proportions, was stabbing the darkness above me. "Back a bit! Two good strokes. Ship your scull! Now jump!" I clawed at the tossing hull and landed in a heap. Davies followed with the painter, and the dinghy swept astern.

"She's riding beautifully now," said he, when he had secured the painter. "There'll be no rolling on the flood, and it's nearly low water."

I don't think I should have cared, however much she had rolled. I was finally cured of funk.

It was well that I was, for to be pitched out of your bunk on to wet oil-cloth is a disheartening beginning to a day. This happened about eight o'clock. The yacht was pitching violently, and I crawled on all fours into the cabin, where Davies was setting out breakfast on the floor.

"I let you sleep on," he said; "we can't do anything till the water falls. We should never get the anchor up in this sea. Come and have a look round. It's clearing now," he went on, when we were crouching low on deck, gripping cleats for safety. "Wind's veered to nor'-west. It's been blowing a full gale, and the sea is at its worst now—near high water. You'll never see worse than this."

I was prepared for what I saw—the stormy sea for leagues around, and a chaos of breakers where our dream-island had stood—and took it quietly, even with a sort of elation. The *Dulcibella* faced the storm as doggedly as ever, plunging her bowsprit into the sea and flinging green water over her bows. A wave of confidence and affection for her welled through me. I had been used to resent the weight and bulk of her unwieldy anchor and cable, but I saw their use now; varnish, paint, spotless decks, and snowy sails were foppish absurdities of a hateful past.

"What can we do to-day?" I asked.

"We must keep well inside the banks and be precious careful wherever there's a swell. It's rampant in here, you see, in spite of the barrier of sand. But there's plenty we can do further back."

We breakfasted in horrible discomfort; then smoked and talked till the roar of the breakers dwindled. At the first sign of bare sand we got under way, under mizzen and head-sails only, and I learned how to sail a reluctant anchor out of the ground. Pivoting round, we scudded east before the wind, over the ground we had traversed the evening before, while an archipelago of new banks slowly shouldered up above the fast weakening waves. We trod delicately among and around them, sounding and observing; heaving to where space permitted, and sometimes using the dinghy. I began to see where the risks lay in this sort of navigation. Wherever the ocean swell penetrated, or the wind blew straight down a long deep channel, we had to be very cautious and leave good margins. "That's the sort of place you mustn't ground on," Davies used to say.

In the end we traversed the Steil Sand again, but by a different swatchway, and anchored, after an arduous day, in

a notch on its eastern limit, just clear of the swell that rolled in from the turbulent estuary of the Elbe. The night was fair, and when the tide receded we lay perfectly still, the fresh wind only sending a lip-lip of ripples against our sides.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE MEANING OF OUR WORK

NOTHING happened during the next ten days to disturb us at our work. During every hour of daylight and many of darkness, sailing or anchored, aground or afloat, in rain and shine, wind and calm, we studied the bed of the estuaries, and practised ourselves in threading the network of channels; holding no communication with the land and rarely approaching it. It was a life of toil, exposure, and peril; a struggle against odds, too; for wild autumnal weather was the rule, with the wind backing and veering between the south-west and north-west, and only for two placid days blowing gently from the east, the safe quarter for this region. Its force and direction determined each fresh choice of ground. If it was high and northerly we explored the inner fastnesses; in moderate intervals the exterior fringe, darting when surprised into whatever lair was most convenient.

Sometimes we were tramping vast solitudes of sand, sometimes scudding across ephemeral tracts of shallow sea. Again, we were creeping gingerly round the deeper arteries that surround the Great Knecht, examining their convolutions as it were the veins of a living tissue, and the circulation of the tide throbbing through them like blood. Again, we would be staggering through the tide-rips and overfalls that infest the open fairway of the Weser on our passage between the Fork and the Pike. On one of our fine days I saw the scene of Davies's original adventure by daylight with the banks dry and the channels manifest. The reader has seen it on the chart, and can, up to a point, form his opinion; I can only add that I realised by ocular proof that no more fatal trap could have been devised for an innocent stranger; for approaching it from the north-west under the easiest conditions it was hard enough to verify our true course. In a period so full of new excitements it is not easy for me to say when we were hardest put to it, especially as it was a rule with Davies never to admit that we were in any danger at all. But I think that our ugliest experience was on the 10th, when, owing to some minute miscalculation, we stranded in a dangerous spot. Mere stranding, of course, was all in the day's work; the constantly recurring question being when and where to court or risk it. This time we were so situated that when the rising tide came again we were on a lee shore, broadside on to a gale of wind which was sending a nasty sea—with a three-mile drift to give it force—down Robin's Balje, which is one of the deeper arteries I spoke of above, and now lay dead to windward of us. The climax came about ten o'clock at night. "We can do nothing till she floats," said Davies; and I can see him now quietly smoking and splicing a chafed warp while he explained that her double skin of teak fitted her to stand anything in reason. She certainly had a terrific test that night, for the bottom was hard, unyielding sand, on which she rose and fell with convulsive vehemence. The last half-hour was for me one of almost intolerable tension. I spent it on deck unable to bear the suspense below. Sheets of driven sea flew bodily over the hull, and a score of times I thought she must succumb as she shivered to the blows of her keel on the sand. But those stout skins knit by honest labour stood the trial. One final thud and she wrenched herself bodily free, found her anchor, and rode clear.

On the whole I think we made few mistakes. Davies had a supreme aptitude for the work. Every hour, sometimes every minute, brought its problem, and his resource never failed. The stiffer it was the cooler he became. He had, too, that intuition which is

independent of acquired skill, and is at the root of all genius; which, to take cases analogous to his own, is the last quality of the perfect guide or scout. I believe he could *smell* sand where he could not see or touch it.

As for me, the sea has never been my element, and never will be; nevertheless, I hardened to the life, grew salt, tough, and tolerably alert. As a soldier learns more in a week of war than in years of parades and pipeclay, so, cut off from all distractions, moving from bivouac to precarious bivouac, and depending, to some extent, for my life on my muscles and wits, I rapidly learnt my work and gained a certain dexterity. I knew my ropes in the dark, could beat economically to windward through squalls, take bearings, and estimate the interaction of wind and tide.

We were generally in solitude, but occasionally we met galliots like the *Johannes* tacking through the sands, and once or twice we found a fleet of such boats anchored in a gut, waiting for water. Their draught, loaded, was from six to seven feet, our own only four, without our centre-plate, but we took their mean draught as the standard of all our observations. That is, we set ourselves to ascertain when and how a vessel drawing six and a half feet could navigate the sands.

A word more as to our motive. It was Davies's conviction, as I have said, that the whole region would in war be an ideal hunting-ground for small free-lance marauders, and I began to know he was right; for look at the three sea-roads through the sands to Hamburg, Bremen, Wilhelmshaven, and the heart of commercial Germany. They are like highways piercing a mountainous district by defiles, where a handful of desperate men can arrest an army.

Follow the parallel of a war on land. People your mountains with a daring and resourceful race, who possess an intimate knowledge of every track and bridle-path, who operate in small bands, travel light, and move rapidly. See what an immense advantage such guerillas possess over an enemy which clings to beaten tracks, moves in large bodies, slowly, and does not "know the country." See how they can not only inflict disasters on a foe who vastly overmatches them in strength, but can prolong a semi-passive resistance long after all the decisive battles have been fought. See, too, how the strong invader can only conquer his elusive antagonists by learning their methods, studying their country, and matching them in mobility and cunning. The parallel must not be pressed too far; but that this sort of warfare will have its counterpart on the sea is a truth which cannot be questioned.

Davies in his enthusiasm set no limits to its importance. The small boat in shallow waters played a mighty *rôle* in his vision of a naval war, a part that would grow in importance as the war developed and reach its height in the final stages.

"The heavy battle fleets are all very well," he used to say, "but if the sides are well matched there might be nothing left of them after a few months of war. They might destroy one another mutually, leaving as nominal conqueror an admiral with scarcely a battleship to bless himself with. It's then that the true struggle will set in; and it's then that anything that will float will be pressed into the service, and anybody who can steer a boat, knows his waters, and doesn't care the toss of a coin for his life, will have magnificent opportunities. It cuts both ways. What small boats can do in these waters is plain enough; but take our own case. Say we're beaten on the high seas by a coalition. There's then a risk of starvation or invasion. It's all rot what they talk about instant surrender. We can live on half-rations, recuperate, and build; but we must have time. Meanwhile our coast and ports are in danger, for the millions we sink in forts and mines won't carry us far. They're fixed — pure passive defence. What you want is *boats*— mosquitoes with stings—swarms of them—patrol-boats, scout-boats, torpedo-boats; intelligent irregulars manned by local men, with a pretty free hand to play their own game. And what a splendid game to play! There are places very like this over there—nothing half so good, but similar—the Mersey estuary, the Dee, the Severn.

the Wash, and, best of all, the Thames, with all the Kent, Essex, and Suffolk banks round it. But as for defending our coasts in the way I mean—we've nothing ready—nothing whatsoever! We don't even build or use small torpedo-boats. These fast 'destroyers' are no good for *this* work—too long and unmanageable, and most of them too deep. What you want is something strong and simple, of light draught, and with only a spar-torpedo, if it came to that. Tugs, launches, small yachts—anything would do at a pinch, for success would depend on intelligence, not on brute force or complicated mechanism. They'd get wiped out often, but what matter? There'd be no lack of the right sort of men for them if the thing was *organised*. But where are the men?

"Or, suppose we have the best of it on the high seas, and have to attack or blockade a coast like this, which is sand from end to end. You can't improvise people who are at home in such waters. The navy chaps don't learn it, though, by Jove! they're the most magnificent service in the world—in pluck, and nerve, and everything else. They'll *try* anything, and often do the impossible. But their boats are deep, and they get little practice in this sort of thing."

Davies never pushed home his argument here; but I know that it was the passionate wish of his heart, somehow and somewhere, to get a chance of turning his knowledge of this coast to practical account in the war that he felt was bound to come, to play that "splendid game" in this, the most fascinating field for it.

I can do no more than sketch his views. Hearing them as I did, with the very splash of the surf and the bubble of the tides in my ears, they made a profound impression on me, and gave me the very zeal for our work he, by temperament, possessed.

But as the days passed and nothing occurred to disturb us, I felt more and more strongly that, as regards our quest, we were on the wrong tack. We found nothing suspicious, nothing that suggested a really adequate motive for Dollmann's treachery. I became impatient, and was for pushing on more quickly westward. Davies still clung to his theory, but the same feeling influenced him.

"It's something to do with these channels in the sand," he persisted, "but I'm afraid, as you say, we haven't got at the heart of the mystery. Nobody seems to care a rap what we do. We haven't done the estuaries as well as I should like, but we'd better push on to the islands. It's exactly the same sort of work, and just as important, I believe. We're bound to get a clue soon."

There was also the question of time, for me at least. I was due to be back in London, unless I obtained an extension, on the 28th, and our present rate of progress was slow. But I cannot conscientiously say that I made a serious point of this. If there was any value in our enterprise at all, official duty paled beside it. The machinery of State would not suffer from my absence; excuses would have to be made, and the results braved.

All the time our sturdy little craft grew shabbier and more weather-worn, the varnish thinner, the decks greyer, the sails dingier, and the cabin roof more murky where stove-fumes stained it. But the only beauty she ever possessed, that of perfect fitness for her functions, remained. With nothing to compare her to she became a home to me. My joints adapted themselves to her crabbed limits, my tastes and habits to her plain domestic economy.

But oil and water were running low, and the time had come for us to be forced to land and renew our stock.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE FIRST NIGHT IN THE ISLANDS

A low line of sandhills, pink and fawn in the setting sun, at one end of them a little white village huddled round the base of a massive four-square lighthouse—such was Wangeroog, the easternmost of the Frisian Islands, as

I saw it on the evening of October 15th. We had decided to make it our first landing-place; and since it possesses no harbour, and is hedged by a mile of sand at low water, we had run in on the rising tide till the yacht grounded, in order to save ourselves as much labour as possible in the carriage to and fro of the heavy water-breakers and oil-cans which we had to replenish. In faint outline three miles to the south of us was the flat plain of Friesland, broken only by some trees, a windmill or two, and a church spire. Between, the shallow expanse of sea was already beginning to shrink away into lagoons, chief among which was the narrow passage by which we had approached from the east. This continued its course west, directly parallel to the island, and in it, at a distance of half a mile from us, three galliots lay at anchor.

Before supper was over the yacht was high and dry, and when we had eaten, Davies loaded himself with cans and breakers. I was for taking my share, but he induced me to stay aboard; for I was dead tired after an unusually long and trying day, which had begun at 2 a.m., when, using a precious instalment of east wind, we had started on a complete passage of the sands from the Elbe to the Jade. It was a barely possible feat for a boat of our low speed to perform in only two tides; and though we just succeeded, it was only by dint of tireless vigilance and severe physical strain.

"Lay out the anchor when you've had a smoke," said Davies, "and keep an eye on the riding-light; it's my only guide back."

He lowered himself, and I heard the scrunch of his sea-boots as he disappeared in the darkness. It was a fine starry night, with a touch of frost in the air. I lit a cigar, and stretched myself on a sofa close to the glow of the stove. The cigar soon languished and dropped, and I dozed uneasily, for the riding-light was on my mind. I got up once and squinted at it through the half-raised skylight, saw it burning steadily, and lay down again. The cabin lamp wanted oil and was dying down to a red-hot wick, but I was too drowsy to attend to it, and it went out. I lit my cigar stump again, and tried to keep awake by thinking. It was the first time I and Davies had been separated for so long; yet so used had we grown to freedom from interference that this would not have disturbed me in the least were it not for a sudden presentiment that on this first night of the second stage of our labours something would happen. All at once I heard a sound outside, a splashing footstep as of a man stepping in a puddle. I was wide awake in an instant, but never thought of shouting "Is that you, Davies?" for I knew in a flash that it was not he. It was the slip of a stealthy man. Presently I heard another footstep—the pad of a boot on the sand—this time close to my ear, just outside the hull; then some more, fainter and further aft. I gently rose and peered aft through the skylight. A glimmer of light, reflected from below, was wavering over the mizzen-mast and bumpkin; it had nothing to do with the riding-light, which hung on the forestay. My prowler, I understood, had struck a match and was reading the name on the stern. How much further would his curiosity carry him? The match went out, and footsteps were audible again. Then a strong, guttural voice called in German, "Yacht ahoy!" I kept silence. "Yacht ahoy!" a little louder this time. A pause, and then a vibration of the hull as boots scraped on it and hands grasped the gunwale. My visitor was on deck. I bobbed down, sat on the sofa, and I heard him moving along the deck, quickly and confidently, first forward to the bows, where he stopped, then back to the companion amidships. Inside the cabin it was pitch dark, but I heard his boots on the ladder, feeling for the steps. In another moment he would be in the doorway lighting his second match. Surely it was darker than before? There had been a little glow from the riding-lamp reflected on to the skylight, but it had disappeared. I looked up, realised, and made a fool of myself. In a few seconds more I should have seen my visitor face to face, perhaps had an interview; but I was new to this sort of work and lost my head. All I thought of was Davies's last words, and saw him astray

on the sands, with no light to guide him back, the tide rising, and a heavy load. I started up involuntarily, bumped against the table, and set the stove jingling. A long step and a grab at the ladder, but just too late! I grasped something damp and greasy, there was tugging and hard breathing, and I was left clasping a big sea-boot, whose owner I heard jump on to the sand and run. I scrambled out, vaulted overboard, and followed blindly by the sound. He had doubled round the bows of the yacht, and I did the same, ducked under the bowsprit, forgetting the bobstay, and fell violently on my head, with all the wind knocked out of me by a wire rope and block whose strength and bulk was one of the glories of the *Dulcibella*. I struggled on as soon as I got some breath, but my invisible quarry was far ahead. I pulled off my heavy boots, carried them, and ran in my stockings, promptly cutting my foot on some cockle-shells. Pursuit was hopeless, and a final stumble over a bit of driftwood sent me sprawling, with agony in my toes.

Limping back, I decided that I had made a very poor beginning as an active adventurer. I had gained nothing, and lost a great deal of breath and skin, and did not even know for certain where I was. The yacht's light was extinguished, and, even with Wangeroog Lighthouse to guide me, I found it no easy matter to find her. She had no anchor out, if the tide rose. And how was Davies to find her? After much feeble circling I took to lying flat at intervals in the hopes of seeing her silhouetted against the starry sky. This plan succeeded at last, and with relief and humility I boarded her, relit the riding-light, and carried out the kedge anchor. The strange boot lay at the foot of the ladder, but it told no tales when I examined it. It was eleven o'clock, past low water. Davies was cutting it fine if he was to get aboard without the dinghy's help. But eventually he reappeared in the most prosaic way, exhausted with his heavy load, but full of talk about his visit ashore. He began while we were still on deck.

"Look here, we ought to have settled more about what we're to say when we're asked questions. I chose a quiet-looking shop, but it turned out to be a sort of inn, where they were drinking pink gin—all very friendly, as usual, and I found myself under a fire of questions. I said we were on our way back to England. There was the usual rot about the smallness of the boat, etc. It struck me that we should want some other pretence for going so slow and stopping to explore, so I had to bring in the ducks, though goodness knows we don't want to waste time over *them*. The subject wasn't quite a success. They said it was too early—jealous, I suppose; but then two fellows spoke up, and asked to be taken on to help. Said they would bring their punt; without local help we should do no good. All true enough, no doubt, but what a nuisance they'd be. I got out of it——"

"It's just as well you did," I interposed. "We shall never be able to leave the boat by herself. I believe we're watched," and I related my experience.

"H'm! It's a pity you didn't see who it was. Confound that bobstay!" (his tactful way of reflecting on my clumsiness); "which way did he run?" I pointed vaguely into the west. "Not towards the island? I wonder if it's someone off one of those galliots. There are three anchored in the channel over there; you can see their lights. You didn't hear a boat pulling off?"

I explained that I had been a miserable failure as a detective.

"You've done jolly well, I think," said Davies. "If you had shouted when you first heard him we should know less still. And we've got a boot, which may come in useful. Anchor out all right? Let's get below."

We smoked and talked till the new flood, lapping softly round the *Dulcibella*, raised her without a jar.

Of course, I argued, there might be nothing in it. The visitor might have been a commonplace thief; an apparently deserted yacht was a tempting bait. Davies scouted this possibility from the first.

"They're not like that in Germany," he said. "In Holland, if you like, they'll do anything. And I don't like that turning out of the lantern to gain time, if we *were* away."

Nor did I. In spite of my blundering in details, I welcomed the incident as the first concrete proof that the object of our quest was no mare's nest. The next point was what was the visitor's object? If to search, what would he have found?

"The charts, of course, with all our corrections and notes, and the log. They'd give us away," was Davies's instant conclusion. Not having his faith in the channel theory, I was lukewarm about his precious charts.

"After all, we're doing nothing wrong, as you've often said yourself," I said.

Still, as a true index to our mode of life they were the only things on board that could possibly compromise us or suggest that we were anything more than eccentric young Englishmen cruising for sport (witness the duck guns) and pleasure. We had two sets of charts, German and English. The former we decided to use in practice, and to hide, together with the log, if occasion demanded. My diary, I resolved, should never leave my person. Then there were the naval books. Davies scanned them with a look I knew well.

"There are too many of them," he said, in the tone of a cook fixing the fate of superfluous kittens. "Let's throw them overboard. They're very old anyhow, and I know them by heart."

"Well, not here!" I protested, for he was laying greedy hands on the shelf; "they'll be found at low water. In fact, I should leave them as they are. You had them when you were here before, and Dollmann knows you had them. If you return without them, it will look queer." They were spared.

The English charts, being relatively useless, though more suitable to our *rôle* as English yachtsmen, were to be left in evidence, as shining proofs of our innocence. It was all delightfully casual, I could not help thinking. A seven-ton yacht does not abound in (dry) hiding-places, and we were helpless against a drastic search. If there *were* secrets on this coast to guard, and we were suspected as spies, there was nothing to prevent an official visit and warning. There need be no prowlers scuttling off when alarmed, unless indeed it was thought wisest to let well alone, if we *were* harmless, and not to arouse suspicions where there were none. Here we lost ourselves in conjecture. Whose agent was the prowler? If Dollmann's, did Dollmann know now that the *Dulcibella* was safe, and back in the region he had expelled her from? If so, was he likely to return to the policy of violence? We found ourselves both glancing at the duck guns strung up under the racks, and then we both laughed and looked foolish. "A war of wits, and not of duck guns," I opined. "Let's look at the chart."

The reader is already familiar with the general aspect of this singular region, and I need only remind him that the mainland is that district of Prussia which is known as East Friesland.* It is a short, flat-topped peninsula, bounded on the west by the Ems estuary and beyond that by Holland, and on the east by the Jade estuary; a low-lying country, containing great tracts of marsh and heath, and few towns of any size; on the north side none. Seven islands lie off the coast. All, except Borkum, which is round, are attenuated strips, slightly crescent-shaped, rarely more than a mile broad, and tapering at the ends; in length averaging about six miles, from Norderney and Juist, which are seven and nine respectively, to little Baltrum, which is only two and a half.

Of the shoal spaces which lie between them and the mainland, two thirds dry at low-water, and the remaining third becomes a system of lagoons whose distribution is controlled by the natural drift of the North Sea as it forces its way through the intervals between the islands. Each of these intervals resembles the bar of a river, and is obstructed by dangerous banks, over which the sea pours at every tide scooping out a deep pool. This fans out and ramifies to east and west as the pent-up current frees itself, encircles the islands, and spreads over the intervening flats. But the further it penetrates the less coursing force it has, and as a result no island is girt completely by a low-water channel. About midway at the back of each of them is a "watershed," only covered for five or six hours out of the twelve. A boat, even of the

* See Map B.

lightest draught, navigating behind the islands must choose its moment for passing these. As to navigability, the "North Sea Pilot" sums up the matter in these dry terms: "The channels dividing these islands from each other and the shore afford to the small craft of the country the means of communication between the Ems and the Jade, to which description of vessels only they are available." The islands are dismissed with a brief note or two about beacons and lights.

The more I looked at the chart the more puzzled I became. The islands were evidently mere sandbanks, with a cluster of houses and a church on each, the only hint of animation in their desolate *ensemble* being the occasional word "Bade-strand," suggesting that they were visited in the summer months by a handful of townsfolk for the sea-bathing. Norderney, of course, was conspicuous in this respect; but even its town, which I know by repute as a gay and fashionable watering-place, would be dead and empty for some months in the year, and could have no commercial importance. No man could do anything on the mainland coast—a monotonous line of dyke punctuated at intervals by an infinitesimal village. Glancing idly at the names of these villages, I noticed that they most of them ended in siel—a repulsive termination, that seemed appropriate to the whole region. There were Carolinensiel, Bensersiel, etc. Siel means either a sewer or a sluice, the latter probably in this case, for I noticed that each village stood at the outlet of a little stream which evidently carried off the drainage of the lowlands behind. A sluice, or lock, would be necessary at the mouth, for at high tide the land is below the level of the sea. Looking next at the sands outside, I noticed that across them and towards each outlet a line of booms was marked, showing that there was some sort of tidal approach to the village, evidently formed by the scour of the little stream.

"Are we going to explore those?" I asked Davies.

"I don't see the use," he answered; "they only lead to those potty little places. I suppose local galliots use them."

"How about your torpedo-boats and patrol-boats?"

"They *might*, at certain tides. But I can't see what value they'd be, unless as a refuge for a German boat in the last resort. They lead to no harbours. Wait! There's a little notch in the dyke at Neuharlingersiel and Dornumersiel, which may mean some sort of a quay arrangement, but what's the use of that?"

"We may as well visit one or two, I suppose?"

"I suppose so; but we don't want to be playing round villages. There's heaps of really important work to do, further out."

"Well, what *do* you make of this coast?"

Davies had nothing but the same old theory, but he urged it with a force and keenness that impressed me more deeply than ever.

"Look at those islands!" he said. "They're clearly the old line of coast, hammered into breaches by the sea. The space behind them is like an immense tidal harbour, thirty miles by five, and they screen it impenetrably. It's absolutely *made* for shallow war-boats under skilled pilotage. They can nip in and out of the gaps, and dodge about from end to end. On one side is the Ems, on the other the big estuaries. It's a perfect base for torpedo-craft."

I agreed (and agree still), but still I shrugged my shoulders.

"We go on exploring, then, in the same way?"

"Yes; keeping a sharp look-out, though. Remember, we shall always be in sight of land now."

"What's the glass doing?"

"Higher than for a long time. I hope it won't bring fog. I know this district is famous for fogs, and fine weather at this time of the year is bad for them anywhere. I would rather it blew, if it wasn't for exploring those gaps, where an on-shore wind would be nasty. Six-thirty to-morrow; not later. I think I'll sleep in the saloon for the future, after what happened to-night."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

BENSERSIEL *

THE decisive incidents of our cruise were now fast approaching. Looking back on the steps that led to them, and anxious that the reader should be wholly with us in our point of view, I think I cannot do better than give extracts from my diary of the next three days :—

"*Oct. 16th* (up at 6.30, yacht high and dry). Of the three galliots out at anchor in the channel yesterday, only one is left. . . . I took my turn with the breakers this morning and walked to Wangeroog, whose village I found half lost in sand drifts, which are planted with tufts of marram-grass in mathematical rows, to give stability and prevent a catastrophe like that at Pompeii. A friendly grocer told me all there is to know, which is little. The islands are what we thought them —barren for the most part, with a small fishing population, and a scanty accession of summer visitors for bathing. The season is over now, and business slack for him. There is still, however, a little trade with the mainland in galliots and lighters, a few of which come from the 'siels' on the mainland. 'Had these harbours?' I asked. 'Mud-holes!' he replied, with a contemptuous laugh. (He is a settler in these wilds, not a native.) Said he had heard of schemes for improving them, so as to develop the islands as health-resorts, but thought it was only a wild speculation.

"A heavy tramp back to the yacht, nearly crushed by impedimenta. While Davies made yet another trip, I stalked some birds with a gun, and obtained what resembled a specimen of the smallest variety of jack-snipe, and small at that; but I made a great noise, which I hope persuaded somebody of the purity of our motives.

"We weighed anchor at one o'clock, and in passing the anchored galliot took a good look at her. *Kormoran* was on her stern; otherwise she was just like a hundred others. Nobody was on deck.

"We spent the whole afternoon till dark exploring the Harle, or gap between Wangeroog and Spiekeroog; the sea breaking heavily on the banks outside. . . . Fine as the day was, the scene from the offing was desolate to the last degree. The naked spots of the two islands are hideous in their sterility: melancholy bits of wreckwood their only relief, save for one or two grotesque beacons, and, most *bizarre* of all, a great church-tower, standing actually *in* the water, on the north side of Wangeroog; a striking witness to the encroachment of the sea. On the mainland, which was barely visible, there was one very prominent landmark, a spire, which from the chart we took to be that of *Esens*, a town four miles inland.

"The days are growing short. Sunset is soon after five, and an hour later it is too dark to see booms and buoys distinctly. The tides also are awkward just now.† High-water at morning and evening is between five and six—just at twilight. For the night, we groped with the lead into the Muschel Balge, the tributary channel which laps round the inside of Spiekeroog, and lay in two fathoms, clear of the outer swell, but rolling a little when the ebb set in strong against the wind.

"A galliot passed us, going west, just as we were stowing sails; too dark to see her name. Later, we saw her anchor-light higher up our channel.

"The great event of the day has been the sighting of a small German gunboat, steaming slowly west along the coast. That was about half-past four, when we were sounding along the Harle.

"Davis identified her at once as the *Blitz*, Commander von Brüning's gunboat. We wondered if he recognised the *Dulcibella*, but, anyway, she seemed to take no notice of us and steamed slowly on. We quite expected to fall in with her when we came to the islands, but the actual sight of her has excited us a good deal. She is an ugly, cranky little vessel, painted grey, with one funnel. Davis is contemptuous about her low freeboard forward; says he

* For this chapter see Map B.

† I exclude all the technicalities that I can, but the reader should take note that the tide-table is very important henceforward.

would rather go to sea in the *Dulce*. He has her dimensions and armament (learnt from Brassey) at his fingers' ends: one hundred and forty feet by twenty-five, one 4.9 gun, one 3.4, and four maxims—an old type. Just going to bed; a bitterly cold night.

"*Oct.* 17*th.*—Glass falling heavily this morning, to our great disgust. Wind back in the S.W. and much warmer. Starting at 5.30, we tacked on the tide over the 'watershed' behind Spiekeroog. So did the galliot we had seen last night, but we again missed identifying her, as she weighed anchor before we came up to her berth. Davies, however, swore she was the *Kormoran*. We lost sight of her altogether for the greater part of the day, which we spent in exploring the Otzumer Ee (the gap between Langeoog and Spiekeroog), now and then firing some perfunctory shots at seals and sea-birds . . . (nautical details omitted). . . . In the evening we were hurrying back to an inside anchorage, when we made a bad mistake; did, in fact, what we had never done before, ran aground on the very top of high water, and are now sitting hard and fast on the edge of the Rute Flat, south of the east spit of Langeoog. The light was bad, and a misplaced boom tricked us; kedging-off failed, and at 8 p.m. we were left on a perfect Ararat of sand, and only a yard or two from that accursed boom, which is perched on the very summit, as a lure to the unwary. It is going to blow hard too, though that is no great matter, as we are sheltered by banks on the sou'-west and nor'-west sides, the likely quarters. We hope to float at 6.15 to-morrow morning, but to make sure of being able to get her off, we have been transferring some ballast to the dinghy, by way of lightening the yacht—a horrid business handling the pigs of lead, heavy, greasy and black. The saloon is an inferno, the deck like a collier's, and ourselves like sweeps.

"The anchors are laid out, and there is nothing more to be done.

"*Oct.* 18*th.*—Half a gale from the sou'-west when we turned out, but it helped us to float off safely at six. The dinghy was very nearly swamped with the weight of lead in it, and getting the ballast back into the yacht was the toughest job of all. We got the dinghy alongside, and Davies jumped in (nearly sinking it for good), balanced himself, fended off, and, whenever he got a chance, attached the pigs one by one on to a bight of rope, secured to the peak halyards, on which I hoisted from the deck. It was touch and go for a few minutes, and then easier.

"It was nine before we had finished replacing the pigs in the hold, a filthy but delicate operation, as they fit like a puzzle, and if one is out of place the floor-boards won't shut down. Coming on deck after it, we saw to our surprise the *Blitz*, lying at anchor in the Schill Balje, inside Spiekeroog, about a mile and a half off. She must have entered the Otzumer Ee at high-water for shelter from the gale; a neat bit of work for a vessel of her size, as Davies says she draws nine-foot-ten, and there can't be more than twelve on the bar at high-water neaps. Several smacks had run in too, and there were two galliots further up our channel, but we couldn't make out if the *Kormoran* was one.

"When the banks uncovered we lay more quietly, so landed and took a long, tempestuous walk over the Rute, with compass and notebooks. Returning at two, we found the glass tumbling down almost visibly.

"I suggested running for Bensersiel, one of the mainland villages south-west of us, on the evening flood, as it seemed just the right opportunity, if we were to visit one of those 'siels' at all. Davies was very lukewarm, but events overcame him. At 3.30 a black, ragged cloud, appearing to trail into the very sea, brought up a terrific squall. This passed, and there was a deathly pause of ten minutes while the whole sky eddied as with smoke-wreaths. Then an icy puff struck us from the north-west, rapidly veering till it reached north-east; there it settled and grew harder every moment.

"'Sou'-west to north-east—only the worst sort do that,' said Davies.

"The shift to the east changed the whole situation (as shifts often have before), making the Rute Flats a lee shore, while to windward lay the deep

lagoons of the Otzumer Ee, bounded indeed by Spickeroog, but still offering a big drift for wind and sea. We had to clear out sharp, so set the mizzen. It was out of the question to beat to windward, for it was blowing a hurricane in a few minutes. We must go to leeward, and Davies was for running further in well behind the Jans sand, and not risking Bensersiel. A blunder of mine, when I went to the winch to get up anchor, settled the question. Thirty out of our forty fathoms of chain were out. Confused by the motion and a blinding sleet-shower that had come on, and forgetting the tremendous strain on the cable, I cast the slack off the bitts and left it loose. There was then only one turn of the chain round the drum, enough in ordinary weather to prevent it running out. But now my first heave on the winch-lever started it slipping, and in an instant it was whizzing out of the hawse-pipe and overboard. I tried to stop it with my foot, stumbled at a heavy plunge of the yacht, heard something snap below, and saw the last of it disappear. The yacht fell off the wind, and drifted astern. I shouted, and had the sense to hoist the reefed foresail at once. Davies had her in hand in no time, and was steering south-west. Going aft I found him cool and characteristic.

"'Doesn't matter,' he said; 'anchor's buoyed.* We'll come back to-morrow and get it. Can't now. Should have had to slip it anyhow; wind and sea too strong. We'll try for Bensersiel. Can't trust to a warp and kedge out here.'

"An exciting run it was, across country, so to speak, over an unboomed watershed; but we had bearings from our morning's walk. Shoal water all the way and a hollow sea breaking everywhere. We soon made out the Bensersiel booms, but even under mizzen and foresail only we travelled too fast, and had to heave to outside them, for the channel looked too shallow still. We lowered half the centre-board and kept her just holding her own to windward, through a most trying period. In the end had to run for it sooner than we meant, as we were sagging to leeward in spite of all, and the light was failing. Bore up at 5.15, and raced up the channel with the booms on our left scarcely visible in the surf and rising water. Davies stood forward, signalling—port, starboard, or steady—with his arms, while I wrestled with the helm, flung from side to side and flogged by wave-tops. Suddenly found a sort of dyke on our right just covering with sea. The shore appeared through scud, and men on a quay shouting. Davies brandished his left arm furiously; I ported hard, and we were in smoother water. A few seconds more and we were whizzing through a slit between two wood jetties. Inside a small square harbour showed, but there was no room to round up properly and no time to lower sails. Davies just threw the kedge over, and it just got a grip in time to check our momentum and save our bowsprit from the quayside. A man threw us a rope and we brought up alongside, rather bewildered.

"Not more so than the natives, who seemed to think we had dropped from the sky. They were very friendly, with an undercurrent of disappointment, having expected salvage work outside, I think. All showed embarrassing helpfulness in stowing sails, etc. We were rescued by a fussy person in uniform and spectacles, who swept them aside and announced himself as the custom-house officer (fancy such a thing in this absurd mud-hole!) marched down into the cabin, which was in a fearful mess and wringing wet, and producing ink, pen, and a huge printed form, wanted to know our cargo, our crew, our last port, our destination, our food, stores, and everything. No cargo (pleasure); captain, Davies; crew, me; last port, Brunsbüttel; destination, England. What spirits had we? Whisky, produced. What salt? Tin of Cerebos, produced, and a damp deposit in a saucer. What coffee? etc. Lockers searched, guns fingered, bunks rifled. Meanwhile the German charts and the log, the damning clues to our purpose, were in full evidence, crying for notice which they did not get. (We had forgotten our precautions in the hurry of

* Ever since leaving the Elbe we had had a buoy-line on our anchor against the emergency of having to slip our cable and run. For the same reason the end of the chain was not made permanently fast below.

our start from the Rute.) When the huge form was as full as he could make it, he suddenly became human, talkative, and thirsty; and, when we treated him, patronising. It seemed to dawn on him that, under our rough clothes and crust of brine and grime, we were two mad and wealthy aristocrats, worthy *protégés* of a high official. He insisted on our bringing our cushions to dry at his house, and to get rid of him we consented, for we were wet, hungry, and longing to change and wash. He talked himself away at last, and we hid the log and charts; but he returned, in the postmaster's uniform this time, before we had finished supper, and haled us and our cushions up through dark and mud to his cottage near the quay. To reach it we crossed a small bridge spanning what seemed to be a small river with sluice-gates, just as we had thought.

"He showed his prizes to his wife, who was quite flustered by the distinguished strangers, and received the cushions with awe; and next we were carried off to the Gasthaus and exhibited to the village circle, where we talked ducks and weather. (Nobody takes us seriously; I never felt less like a conspirator.) Our friend, who is a feather-headed chatterbox, is enormously important about his ridiculous little port, whose principal customer seems to be the Langeoog post-boat, a galliot running to and fro according to tide. A few lighters also come down the stream with bricks and produce from the interior, and are towed to the islands. The harbour has from five to seven feet in it for two hours out of twelve! Herr Schenkel talked us back to the yacht, which we found resting on the mud—and here we are. Davies pretends there are harbour smells, and says he won't be able to sleep; is already worrying about how to get away from here. Ashore, they were saying that it's impossible, under sail, in strong north-east winds, the channel being too narrow to tack in. For my part I find it a huge relief to be in any sort of harbour after a fortnight in the open. There are no tides or anchors to think about, and no bumping or rolling. Fresh milk to-morrow!"

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

COMMANDER VON BRÜNING

To resume my story in narrative form.

I was awakened at ten o'clock on the 19th, after a long and delicious sleep, by Davies's voice outside, talking his unmistakable German. Looking out, in my pyjamas, I saw him on the quay above in conversation with a man in a long macintosh coat and a gold-laced navy cap. He had a close-trimmed auburn beard, a keen, handsome face, and an animated manner. It was raining in a raw air.

They saw me, and Davies said: "Hullo, Carruthers! Here's Commander von Brüning from the *Blitz*—that's 'meiner Freund' Carruthers. (Davies was deplorably weak in terminations.)

The commander smiled broadly at me, and I inclined an uncombed head, while, for a moment, the quest was a dream, and I myself felt unutterably squalid and foolish. I ducked down, heard them parting, and Davies came aboard.

"We're to meet him at the inn for a talk at twelve," he said.

His news was that the *Blitz*'s steam-cutter had come in on the morning tide, and he had met von Brüning when marketing at the inn. Secondly, the *Kormoran* had also come in, and was moored close by. It was as clear as possible, therefore, that the latter *had* watched us, and was in touch with the *Blitz*, and that both had seized the opportunity of our being cooped up in Bensersiel to take further stock of us. What had passed hitherto? Nothing much. Von Brüning had greeted Davies with cordial surprise, and said he had wondered yesterday if it was the *Dulcibella* that he had seen anchored behind Langeoog. Davies had explained that we had left the Baltic and were on our way home; taking the shelter of the islands.

"Supposing he comes on board and asks to see our log?" I said.

"Pull it out," said Davies. "It's rot, this hiding, after all. I say, I rather funk this interview; what are we to say? It's not in my line."

We resolved abruptly on an important change of plan, replaced the log and charts in the rack as the first logical step. They contained nothing but bearings, courses, and the bare data of navigation. To Davies they were hard-won secrets of vital import, to be lied for, however hard and distasteful lying was. I was cooler as to their value, but in any case the same thing was now in both our minds. There would be great difficulties in the coming interview if we tried to be too clever and conceal the fact that we had been exploring. We did not know how much von Brüning knew. When had our surveillance by the *Kormoran* begun? Apparently at Wangeroog, but possibly in the estuaries, where we had not fired a shot at duck. Perhaps he knew even more — Dollmann's treachery, Davies's escape, and our subsequent movements—we could not tell. On the other hand, exploration was known to be a fad of Davies's, and in September he had made no secret of it. It was safer to be consistent now. After breakfast we determined to find out something about the *Kormoran*, which lay on the mud at the other side of the harbour, and accordingly addressed ourselves to two mighty sailors, whose jerseys bore the legend "Post," and who towered conspicuous among a row of stolid Frisians on the quay, all gazing gravely down at us as at a curious bit of marine bric-à-brac. The twins (for such they proved to be) were most benignant giants, and asked us aboard the post-boat galliot for a chat. It was easy to bring the talk naturally round to the point we wished, and we soon gained some most interesting information, delivered in the broadest Frisian, but intelligible enough. They called the *Kormoran* a Memmert boat, or "wreck-works" boat. It seemed that off the western end of Juist, the island lying west of Norderney, there lay the bones of a French war-vessel, wrecked ages ago. She carried bullion which has never been recovered, in spite of many efforts. A salvage company was trying for it now, and had works on Memmert, an adjacent sand-bank. "That is Herr Grimm, the overseer himself," they said, pointing to the bridge above the sluice-gates. (I call him "Grimm" because it describes him exactly.) A man in a pilot jacket and peaked cap was leaning over the parapet.

"What's he doing here?" I asked.

They answered that he was often up and down the coast, work on the wreck being impossible in rough weather. They supposed he was bringing cargo in his galliot from Wilhelmshaven, all the company's plant and stores coming from that port. He was a local man from Aurich; an ex-tug skipper.

We discussed this information while walking out over the sands to see the channel at low water.

"Did you hear anything about this in September?" I asked.

"Not a word. I didn't go to Juist. I would have, probably, if I hadn't met Dollmann."

What in the world did it mean? How did it affect our plans?

"Look at his boots if we pass him," was all Davies had to suggest.

The channel was now a ditch, with a trickle in it, running north by east, roughly, and edged by a dyke of withies for the first quarter of a mile. It was still blowing fresh from the north-east, and we saw that exit was impossible in such a wind.

So back to the village, a paltry, bleak little place. We passed friend Grimm on the bridge; a dark, clean-shaved, saturnine man, wearing *shoes*. Approaching the inn:—

"We haven't settled quite enough, have we?" said Davies. "What about our future plans?"

"Heaven knows, we haven't," I said. "But I don't see how we can. We must see how things go. It's past twelve, and it won't do to be late."

"Well, I leave it to you."

"All right, I'll do my best. All you've got to do is to be yourself and tell one lie, if need be, about the trick Dollmann played you."

The next scene: von Brüning, Davies, and I, sitting over coffee and Kümmel at a table in a dingy inn-parlour overlooking the harbour and the

sea, Davies with a full box of matches on the table before him. The commander gave us a hearty welcome, and I am bound to say I liked him at once, as Davies had done; but I feared him, too, for he had honest eyes, but abominably clever ones.

I had impressed on Davies to talk and question as freely and naturally as though nothing uncommon had happened since he last saw von Brüning on the deck of the *Medusa*. He must ask about Dollmann — the mutual friend—at the outset, and, if questioned about that voyage in his company to the Elbe, must lie like a trooper as to the danger he had been in. This was the one clear and essential necessity, where much was difficult. Davies did his duty with precipitation, and blushed when he put his question, in a way that horrified me, till I remembered that his embarrassment was due, and would be ascribed to, another cause.

"Herr Dollmann is away still, I think," said von Brüning. (So Davies had been right at Brunsbüttel.) "Were you thinking of looking him up again?" he added.

"Yes," said Davies, shortly.

"Well, I'm sure he's away. But his yacht is back, I believe—and Fräulein Dollmann, I suppose."

"H'm!" said Davies; "she's a very fine boat that."

Our host smiled, gazing thoughtfully at Davies, who was miserable. I saw a chance, and took it mercilessly.

"We can call on Fräulein Dollmann, at least, Davies," I said, with a meaning smile at von Brüning.

"H'm!" said Davies; "will he be back soon, do you think?"

The commander had begun to light a cigar, and took his time in answering. "Probably," he said, after some puffing, "he's never away very long. But you've seen them later than I have. Didn't you sail to the Elbe together the day after I saw you last?"

"Oh, part of the way," said Davies, with great negligence. "I haven't seen him since. He got there first; outsailed me."

"Gave you the slip, in fact?"

"Of course he beat me; I was close-reefed. Besides——"

"Oh, I remember; there was a heavy blow—a devil of a heavy blow. I thought of you that day. How did you manage?"

"Oh, it was a fair wind; it wasn't far, you see."

"Grosse Gott! In *that*." He nodded towards the window whence the *Dulcibella's* taper mast could be seen pointing demurely heavenwards.

"She's a splendid sea-boat," said Davies, indignantly.

"A thousand pardons!" said von Brüning, laughing.

"Don't shake my faith in her," I put in. "I've got to get to England in her."

"Heaven forbid; I was only thinking that there must have been some sea round the Scharhorn that day; a tame affair, no doubt, Herr Davies?"

"Scharhorn?" said Davies, who did not catch the idiom in the latter sentence. "Oh, we didn't go that way. We cut through the sands—by the Telte."

"The Telte! In a north-west gale!" The commander started, ceased to smile, and only stared. (It was genuine surprise; I could swear it. He had heard nothing of this before.)

"Herr Dollmann knew the way," said Davies, doggedly. "He kindly offered to pilot me through, and I wouldn't have gone otherwise." There was an awkward little pause.

"He led you well, it seems?" said von Brüning.

"Yes; there's a nasty surf there, though, isn't there? But it saves six miles—and the Scharhorn. Not that I saved distance. I was fool enough to run aground."

"Ah!" said the other, with interest.

"It didn't matter, because I was well inside then. Those sands are difficult at high water. We've come back that way, you know."

("And we run aground every day," I remarked, with resignation.)

"Is that where the *Medusa* gave you the slip?" asked von Brüning, still studying Davies with a strange look, which I strove anxiously to analyse.

"She wouldn't have noticed," said Davies. "It was very thick and squally —and she had got some way ahead. There was no need for her to stop, anyway. I got off all right; the tide

was rising still. But, of course, I anchored there for the night."

"Where?"

"Inside there, under the Hohenhörn," said Davies, simply.

"Under the *what?*"

"The Hohenhörn."

"Go on—didn't they wait for you at Cuxhaven?"

"I don't know; I didn't go that way." The commander looked more and more puzzled.

"Not by the ship canal, I mean. I changed my mind about it, because the next day the wind was easterly. It would have been a dead beat across the sands to Cuxhaven, while it was a fair wind straight out to the Eider River. So I sailed there, and reached the Baltic that way. It was all the same."

There was another pause.

"Well done, Davies," I thought. He had told his story well, using no subtlety. I knew it was exactly how he would have told it to anyone else, if he had not had irrefutable proof of foul play.

The commander laughed, suddenly and heartily. "Another liqueur?" he said. Then, to me: "Upon my word, your friend amuses me. It's impossible to make him spin a yarn. I expect he had a bad time of it."

"That's nothing to him," I said; "he prefers it. He anchored me the other day behind the Hohenhörn in a gale of wind; said it was safer than a harbour, and more sanitary."

"I wonder he brought you here last night. It was a fair wind for England; and not very far."

"There was no pilot to follow, you see."

"With a charming daughter—no."

Davies frowned and glared at me. I was merciful and changed the subject.

"Besides," I said, "we've left our anchor and chain out there." And I made confession of my sin.

"Well, as it's buoyed, I should advise you to pick it up as soon as you can," said von Brüning, carelessly; "or someone else will."

"Yes, by Jove! Carruthers," said Davies, eagerly, "we must get out on this next tide."

"Oh, there's no hurry," I said, partly from policy, partly because the ease of the shore was on me. To sit on a chair upright is something of a luxury, however good the cause in which you have crouched like a monkey over a table at the level of your knees, with a reeking oil-stove at your ear.

"They're honest enough about here, aren't they?" I added. While the words were on my lips I remembered the midnight visitor at Wangeroog, and guessed that von Brüning was leading up to a test. Grimm (if he was the visitor) would have told him of his narrow escape from detection, and reticence on our part would show we suspected something. I could have kicked myself, but it was not too late. I took the bull by the horns, and, before the commander could answer, added:—

"By Jove! Davies, I forgot about that fellow at Wangeroog. The anchor might be stolen, as he says."

Davies looked blank, but von Brüning had turned to me.

"We never dreamed there would be thieves among these islands," I said, "but the other night I nearly caught a fellow in the act. He thought the yacht was empty."

I described the affair in detail, and with what humour I could. Our host was amused, and apologetic for the islanders.

"They're excellent folk," he said, "but they're born with predatory instincts. Their fathers made their living out of wrecks on this coast, and the children inherit a weakness for plunder. When Wangeroog lighthouse was built they petitioned the Government for compensation, in perfect good faith. The coast is well lighted now, and windfalls are rare, but the sight of a stranded yacht, with the owners ashore, would inflame the old passion; and, depend upon it, someone has seen that anchor-buoy."

The word "wrecks" had set me tingling. Was it another test? Impossible to say; but audacity was safer than reserve, and might save trouble in the future.

"Isn't there the wreck of a treasure-ship somewhere further west?" I asked. "We heard of it at Wangeroog" (my first inaccuracy). "They said a company was exploiting it."

"Quite right," said the commander, without a sign of embarrassment. "I

don't wonder you heard of it. It's one of the few things folk have to talk about in these parts. It lies on Juister Riff, a shoal off Juist.* She was a French frigate, the *Corinne*, bound from Hamburg to Havre in 1811, when Napoleon held Hamburg as tight as Paris. She carried a million and a half in gold bars, and was insured in Hamburg; foundered in four fathoms, broke up, and there lies the treasure."

"Never been raised?"

"No. The underwriters failed and went bankrupt, and the wreck came into the hands of your English Lloyds'. It remained their property till '75, but they never got at the bullion. In fact, for fifty years it was never scratched at, and its very position grew doubtful, for the sand swallowed every stick. The rights passed through various hands, and in '86 were held by an enterprising Swedish company, which brought modern appliances, dived, dredged, and dug, fished up a lot of timber and bric-à-brac, and then broke. Since then, two Hamburg firms have tackled the job and lost their capital. Scores of lives have been spent over it, all told, and probably a million of money. Still there are the bars, somewhere."

"And what's being done now?"

"Well, recently a small local company was formed. It has a depôt at Memmert, and is working with a good deal of perseverance. An engineer from Bremen was the principal mover, and a few men from Norderney and Emden subscribed the capital. By the way, our friend Dollmann is largely interested in it."

Out of the corner of my eye I saw Davies's tell-tale face growing troubled with inward questionings.

"We mustn't get back to him," I said, laughing. "It's not fair to my friend. But all this is very interesting. Will they ever get those bars?"

"Ah! that's the point," said von Brüning, with a mysterious twinkle. "It's an undertaking of immense difficulty; for the wreck is wholly disintegrated, and the gold, being the heaviest part of it, has, of course, sunk the deepest. Dredging is useless after a certain point; and the divers have to make excavations in the sand, and shore them up as best they can. Every gale nullifies half their labour, and weather like this of the last fortnight plays the mischief with the work. Only this morning I met the overseer, who happens to be ashore here. He was as black as thunder over prospects."

"Well, it's a romantic speculation," I said. "They deserve a return for their money."

"I hope they'll get it," said the commander. "The fact is, I hold a few shares myself."

"Oh, I hope I haven't been asking indiscreet questions?"

"Oh, dear no; all the world knows what I've told you. But you'll understand that one has to be reticent as to results in such a case. It's a big stake, and the *title is none too sound*. There has been litigation over it. Not that I worry much about my investment; for I shan't lose much by it at the worst. But it gives one an interest in this abominable coast. I go and see how they're getting on sometimes, when I'm down that way."

"It *is* an abominable coast," I agreed, heartily, "though you won't get Davies to agree."

"It's a magnificent place for sailing," said Davies, looking wistfully out over the storm-speckled grey of the North Sea. He underwent some more chaff, and the talk passed to our cruising adventures in the Baltic and the estuaries. Von Brüning cross-examined us with the most charming urbanity and skill. Nothing he asked could cause us the slightest offence; and a responsive frankness was our only possible course. So, date after date, and incident after incident were elicited in the most natural way. As we talked I was astonished to find how little there was that was worth concealing, and heartily thankful that we had decided on candour. My fluency gave me the lead, and Davies followed me; but his own personality was really our tower of strength. I realised that, as I watched the play of his eager features, and heard him struggle for expression on his favourite hobby; all his pet phrases translated crudely into the most excruciating German. He was convincing, because he was himself.

* See Map B.

"Are there many like you in England?" asked von Brüning once.

"Like me? Of course—lots," said Davies.

"I wish there were more in Germany; they play at yachting over here—on shore half the time, drinking and loafing; paid crews, clean hands, white trousers; laid up in the middle of September."

"We haven't seen many yachts about," said Davies, politely.

For my part, I made no pretence of being a Davies. Faithful to my lower nature, I vowed the Germans were right, and, not without a secret zest, drew a lurid picture of the horrors of crewless cruising, and the drudgery that my remorseless skipper inflicted on me. It was delightful to see Davies wincing when I described my first night at Flensburg, for I had my revenge at last, and did not spare him. He bore up gallantly under my jesting, but I knew very well by his manner that he had not forgiven me my banter about the "charming daughter."

"You speak German well," said von Brüning.

"I have lived in Germany," said I.

"Studying for a profession, I suppose?"

"Yes," said I, thinking ahead. "Civil Service," was my prepared answer to the next question, but again (morbidly, perhaps) I saw a pitfall. That letter from my chief awaiting me at Norderney? My name was known, and we were watched. It might be opened. Lord! how casual we had been!

"May I ask what?"

"The Foreign Office." It sounded suspicious, but there it was.

"Indeed—in the Government service? When do you have to be back?"

That was how the question of our future intentions was raised, prematurely for me; for two conflicting theories were clashing in my brain. But the contents of the letter dogged me now, and "when at a loss, tell the truth," was an axiom I was finding sound. So I answered, "Pretty soon; in about a week. But I'm expecting a letter at Norderney, which may give me an extension. Davies said it was a good address to give," I added, smiling.

"Naturally," said von Brüning, dryly; the joke had apparently ceased to amuse him. "But you haven't much time then, have you?" he added, "unless you leave your skipper in the lurch. It's a long way to England, and the season is late for yachts."

I felt myself being hurried.

"Oh, you don't understand," I explained; "*he's* in no hurry. He's a man of leisure; aren't you, Davies?"

"What?" said Davies.

I translated my cruel question.

"Yes," said Davies, with simple pathos.

"If I have to leave him I shan't be missed—as an able seaman, at least. He'll just potter on down the islands, running aground and kedging off, and arrive about Christmas."

"Or take the first fair gale to Dover," laughed the commander.

"Or that. So, you see, we're in no hurry; and we never make plans. And as for a passage to England straight, I'm not such a coward as I was at first, but I draw the line at that."

"You're a curious pair of shipmates; what's your point of view, Herr Davies?"

"I like this coast," said Davies. "And—we want to shoot some ducks." He was nervous, and forgot himself. I had already satirised our sporting armament and exploits, and hoped the subject was disposed of. Ducks were pretexts, and might lead to complications. I particularly wanted a free hand.

"As to wild fowl," said our friend, "I would like to give you gentlemen some advice. There are plenty to be got, now that autumn weather has set in (you wouldn't have got a shot in September, Herr Davies; I remember your asking about them when I saw you last). And even now it's early for amateurs. In hard winter weather a child can pick them up; but they're wild still, and want crafty hunting. You want a local punt, and above all a local man (you could stow him in your fo'c'sle), and to go to work seriously. Now, if you really wish for sport, I could help you. I could get you a trustworthy——"

"Oh, it's too good of you," stammered Davies, in a more unhappy

accent than usual. "We can easily find one for ourselves. A man at Wangeroog offered——"

"Oh, did he?" interrupted von Brüning, laughing. "I'm not surprised. You don't know the Frieslanders. They're guileless, as I said, but they cling to their little perquisites." (I translated to Davies.) "They've been cheated out of wrecks, and they're all the more sensitive about ducks, which are more lucrative than fish. A stranger is a poacher. Your man would have made slight errors as to time and place."

"You said they were odd in their manner, didn't you, Davies?" I put in. "Look here, this is very kind of Commander von Brüning; but hadn't we better be certain of my plans before settling down to shoot? Let's push on direct to Norderney and get that letter of mine, and then decide. But we shan't see you again, I suppose, commander?"

"Why not? I am cruising westwards, and shall probably call at Norderney. Come aboard if you're there, won't you? I should like to show you the *Blitz*."

"Thanks, very much," said Davies, uneasily.

"Thanks, very much," said I, as heartily as I could.

Our party broke up soon after this.

"Well, gentlemen, I must take leave of you," said our friend. "I have to drive to Esens. I shall be going back to the *Blitz* on the evening tide, but you'll be busy then with your own boat."

It had been a puzzling interview, but the greatest puzzle was still to come. As we went towards the door, von Brüning made a sign to me. We let Davies pass out and remained standing.

"One word in confidence with you, Herr Carruthers," he said, speaking low. "You won't think me officious, I hope. I only speak out of keen regard for your friend. It is about the Dollmanns—you see how the land lies? I wouldn't encourage him."

"Thanks," I said, "but really——"

"It's only a hint. He's a splendid young fellow, but if anything—you understand—too honest and simple. I take it you have influence with him, and I should use it."

"I was not in earnest," I said. "I have never seen the Dollmanns; I thought they were friends of yours," I added, looking him straight in the eyes.

"I know them, but"—he shrugged his shoulders—"I know everybody."

"What's wrong with them?" I said, point-blank.

"Softly! Herr Carruthers. Remember, I speak out of pure friendliness to you as strangers, foreigners, and young. You I take to have discretion, or I should not have said a word. Still, I will add this. We know very little of Herr Dollmann, of his origin, his antecedents. He is half a Swede, I believe, certainly not a Prussian; came to Norderney three years ago, appears to be rich, and has joined in various commercial undertakings. Little scope about here? Oh, there is more enterprise than you think—development of bathing resorts, you know, speculation in land on these islands. Sharp practice? Oh, no! he's perfectly straight in that way. But he's a queer fellow, of eccentric habits, and—and, well, as I say, little is known of him. That's all, just a warning. Come along."

I saw that to press him further was useless.

"Thanks; I'll remember," I said.

"And look here," he added, as we walked down the passage, "if you take my advice, you'll omit that visit to the *Medusa* altogether." He gave me a steady look, smiling gravely.

"How much do you know, and what do you mean?" were the questions that throbbed in my thoughts; but I could not utter them, so I said nothing and felt very young.

Outside we joined Davies, who was knitting his brow over prospects.

"It just comes of going into places like this," he said to me. "We may be stuck here for days. Too much wind to tow out with the dinghy, and too narrow a channel to beat in."

Von Brüning was ready with a new proposal.

"Why didn't I think of it before?" he said. "I'll tow you out in my launch. Be ready at 6.30; we shall have water enough then. My men will send you a warp."

It was impossible to refuse, but a sense of being personally conducted again oppressed me; and the last hope

of a bed in the inn vanished. Davies was none too effusive either. A tug meant a pilot, and he had had enough of them.

"He objects to towage on principle," I said.

"Just like him!" laughed the other. "That's settled, then!"

A dogcart was standing before the inn door in readiness for von Brüning. I was curious about Esens and his business there. Esens, he said, was the principal town of the district, four miles inland.

"I have to go there," he volunteered, "about a poaching case—a Dutchman trawling inside our limits. That's my work, you know—police duty."

Had the words a deeper meaning?

"Do you ever catch an Englishman?" I asked, recklessly.

"Oh, very rarely; your countrymen don't come so far as this—except on pleasure." He bowed to us each and smiled.

"Not much of that to be got in Bensersiel," I laughed.

"I'm afraid you'll have a dull afternoon. Look here. I know you can't leave your boat altogether, and it's no use asking Herr Davies; but will *you* drive into Esens with me and see a Frisian town—for what it's worth? You're getting a dismal impression of Friesland." I excused myself, said I would stop with Davies; we would walk out over the sands and prospect for the evening's sail.

"Well, good-bye, then," he said, "till the evening. Be ready for the warp at 6.30."

He jumped up, and the cart rattled off through the mud, crossed the bridge, and disappeared into the dreary hinterland.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

CLEARING THE AIR

"HAS he gone to get the police, do you think?" said Davies, grimly.

"I don't think so," said I. "Let's go aboard before that customs fellow button-holes us."

A diminished row of stolid Frisians still ruminated over the *Dulcibella*. Friend Grimm was visible smoking on his forecastle. We went on board in silence.

"First of all, where exactly is Memmert?" I said.

Davies pulled down the chart, said "There," and flung himself at full length on a sofa.

The reader can see Memmert for himself. South of Juist,* abutting on the Ems delta, lies an extensive sandbank called Nordland, whose extreme western rim remains uncovered at the highest tides; the effect being to leave a C-shaped island, a mere paring of sand like a boomerang, nearly two miles long, but only 150yds. or so broad, of curiously symmetrical outline, except at one spot, where it bulges to the width of a quarter of a mile. On the English chart its nakedness was absolute, save for a beacon at the south; but the German chart marked a building at the point where the bulge occurs. This was evidently the depôt. "Fancy living there!" I thought, for the very name struck cold. No wonder Grimm was grim; and no wonder he was used to seek change of air. But the advantages of the site were obvious. It was remarkably isolated, even in a region where isolation is the rule; yet it was conveniently near the wreck, which, as we had heard, lay two miles out on the Juister Reef. Lastly, it was clearly accessible at any state of the tide, for the six-fathom channel of the Ems estuary runs hard up to it on the south, and thence sends off an eastward branch which closely borders the southern horn, thus offering an anchorage at once handy, deep, and sheltered from seaward gales.

Such was Memmert as I saw it on the chart, taking in its features mechanically, for while Davies lay there heedless and taciturn, a pretence of interest was useless. I knew perfectly well what was between us, but I did not see why I should make the first move; for I had a grievance too, an old one. So I sat back on my sofa and jotted down in my notebook the heads of our conversation at the inn while it

* See Map B.

was fresh in my memory, and strove to draw conclusions. But the silence continuing and becoming absurd, I threw my pride to the winds, and my notebook on the table.

"I say, Davies," I said, "I'm awfully sorry I chaffed you about Fräulein Dollmann." (No answer.) "Didn't you see I couldn't help it?"

"I wish to Heaven we had never come in here," he said, in a hard voice; "it comes of landing *ever*." (I couldn't help smiling at this, but he wasn't looking at me.) "Here we are, given away, moved on, taken in charge, arranged for like Cook's tourists. I couldn't follow your game — too infernally deep for me, but——" That stung me.

"Look here," I said, "I did my best. It was you that muddled it. Why did you harp on ducks?"

"We could have got out of that. Why did you harp on everything idiotic—your letter, the Foreign Office, the *Kormoran*, the wreck, the——?"

"You're utterly unreasonable. Didn't you see what traps there were? I was driven the way I went. We started unprepared, and we're jolly well out of it."

Davies drove on blindly. "It was bad enough telling all about the channels and exploring——"

"Why, you agreed to that yourself!"

"I gave in to you. We can't explore any more now."

"There's the wreck, though."

"Oh, hang the wreck! It's all a blind, or he wouldn't have made so much of it. There are all these channels to be——"

"Oh, hang the channels! I know we wanted a free hand, but we've got to go to Norderney some time, and if Dollmann's away——"

"Why did you harp on Miss Dollmann?" said Davies.

We had worked round, through idle recrimination, to the real point of departure. I knew Davies was not himself, and would not return to himself till the heart of the matter was reached.

"Look here," I said, "you brought me out here to help you, because, as you say, I was clever, talked German, and—liked yachting (I couldn't resist adding this). But directly you really *want* me you turn round and go for me."

"Oh, I didn't mean all that, really," said Davies; "I'm sorry—I was worried."

"I know; but it's your own fault. You haven't been fair with me. There's a complication in this business that you've never talked about. I've never pressed you because I thought you would confide in me. You——"

"I know I haven't," said Davies.

"Well, you see the result. Our hand was forced. To have said nothing about Dollmann was folly—to have said he tried to wreck you was equal folly. The story we agreed on was the best and safest, and you told it splendidly. But for two reasons I had to harp on the daughter—one because your manner when they were mentioned was so confused as to imperil our whole position. Two, because your story, though the safest, was, at the best, suspicious. Even on your own showing Dollmann treated you badly — discourteously, say; though you pretended not to have seen it. You want a motive to neutralise that, and induce you to revisit him in a friendly way. I supplied it, or rather I only encouraged von Brüning to supply it."

"Why revisit him, after all?" said Davies.

"Oh, come——"

"But don't you see what a hideous fix you've put me in? How caddish I feel about it?"

I did see, and I felt a cad myself, as his full distress came home to me. But I felt, too, that, whosesoever the fault, we had drifted into a ridiculous situation, and were like characters in one of those tiresome plays where misunderstandings are manufactured and so carefully sustained that the audience are too bored to wait for the *dénouement*. You can do that on the stage; but we wanted our *dénouement*.

"I'm very sorry," I said, "but I wish you had told me all about it. Won't you now? Just the bare, matter-of-fact truth. I hate sentiment, and so do you."

"I find it very difficult to tell people things," said Davies, "things like this." I waited. "I did like her—very much." Our eyes met for a second, in which all was said that need be said, as between two of our phlegmatic race. "And she's—separate from him. That

was the reason of all my indecisions," he hurried on. "I only told you half at Schlei. I know I ought to have been open, and asked your advice. But I let it slide. I've been hoping all along that we might find what we want and win the game without coming to close quarters again."

I no longer wondered at his devotion to the channel theory, since, built on conviction, it was thus doubly fortified.

"Yet you always knew what might happen," I said. "At Schlei you spoke of 'settling with' Dollmann."

"I know. When I thought of him I was mad. I made myself forget the other part."

"Which recurred at Brunsbüttel?" I thought of the news we had there.

"Yes."

"Davies, we must have no more secrets. I'm going to speak out. Are you sure you've not misunderstood her? You say—and I'm willing to assume it—that Dollmann's a traitor and a murderer."

"Oh, hang the murder part!" said Davies, impatiently. "What does *that* matter?"

"Well, traitor. Very good; but in that case I suspect his daughter. No! let me go on. She was useful, to say the least. She encouraged you—you've told me that—to make that passage with them."

"Stop, Carruthers," said Davies, firmly. "I know you mean kindly; but it's no use. I believe in her."

I thought for a moment.

"In that case," I said, "I've something to propose. When we get out of this place let's sail straight away to England." ("There, Commander von Brüning," I thought, "you never can say I neglected your advice.")

"No!" exclaimed Davies, starting up and facing me. "I'm hanged if we will. Think what's at stake. Think of that traitor—plotting with Germans. My God!"

"Very good," I said. "I'm with you for going on. But let's face facts. We *must* scotch Dollmann. We can't do so without hurting *her*."

"Can't we *possibly*?"

"Of course not; be sensible, man. Face that. Next point; it's absurd to hope that we need not revisit them—it's ten to one that we must, if we're to succeed. His attempt on you is the whole foundation of our suspicions. And we don't even know for certain who he *is* yet. We're committed, I know, to going straight to Norderney now; but even if we weren't, should we do any good by exploring and prying? It's very doubtful. We know we're watched, if not suspected, and that disposes of nine-tenths of our power. The channels? Yes, but is it likely they'll let us learn them by heart, if they're of such vital importance, even if we are thought to be *bona fide* yachtsmen? And, seriously, apart from their value in war, which I don't deny, are they at the root of this business? But we'll talk about that in a moment. The point now is, what shall we do if we meet the Dollmanns?"

Beads of sweat stood on Davies's brow. I felt like a torturer, but it could not be helped. "Tax him with having wrecked you? Our quest would be at an end! We must be friendly. You must tell the story you told to-day, and chance his believing it. If he does, so much the better; if he doesn't, he won't dare say so, and we still have chances. We gain time, and have a tremendous hold on him—*if* we're friendly." Davies winced. I gave another turn to the screw. "Friendly with them *both*, of course. You were before, you know; you liked her very much—you must seem to still."

"Oh, stop your infernal logic."

"Shall we chuck it and go to England?" I asked again, as an inquisitor might say, "Have you had enough?" No answer. I went on: "To make it easier, you *do* like her still." I had roused my victim at last.

"What the devil do you mean, Carruthers? That I'm to trade on my liking for her—on her innocence, to—good God! what *do* you mean?"

"No, no, not that. I'm not such a cad, or such a fool, or so ignorant of you. If she knows nothing of her father's character and likes you—and you like her—and you are what you are—oh, Heavens! man, face it, realise it! But what I mean is this; is she, *can* she be, what you think? Imagine his position, if we're right about him; the vilest creature on God's earth—a disgraceful past to have been driven to this—in the pay of Germany. I want to spare you misery." I was going to add: "And

if you're on your guard, to increase our chances." But the utter futility of such suggestions silenced me. What a plan I had foreshadowed! An enticing plan, and a fair one, too, as against such adversaries; turning this baffling cross-current to advantage as many a time we had worked eddies of an adverse tide in these difficult seas. But Davies was Davies, and there was an end of it; his faith and simplicity shamed me. And the pity of it, the cruelty of it, was that his very qualities were his last torture, raising to the acutest pitch the conflict between love and patriotism. Remember that the latter was his dominant life-motive, and that here and now was his chance—if you would gauge the bitterness of that conflict.

It was in its last throes now. His elbows were on the table, and his twitching hands pressed on his forehead. He took them away.

"Of course we must go on. It can't be helped, that's all."

"And you believe in her?"

"I'll remember what you've said. There may be some way out. And—I'd rather not talk about that any more. What about the wreck?"

Further argument was futile. Davies by an effort seemed to sweep the subject from his thoughts, and I did my best to do the same. At any rate the air was cleared—we were friends; and it only remained to grapple with the main problem in the light of the morning's interview.

Every word that I could recollect of that critical conversation I reviewed with Davies, who had imperfectly understood what he had not been directly concerned in; and, as I did so, I began to see with what cleverness each succeeding sentence of von Brüning's was designed to suit both of two contingencies. If we were innocent travellers, he was the genial host, communicative and helpful. If we were spies, his tactics had been equally applicable. He had outdone us in apparent candour, hiding nothing which he knew we would discover for ourselves, and contriving at the same time both to gain knowledge and control of our movements, and to convey us warnings, which would only be understood if we were guilty, that we were playing an idle and perilous game, and had better desist. But in one respect we had had the advantage, and that was in the version Davies had given of his stranding on the Hohenhörn. Inscrutable as our questioner was, he let it appear not only that the incident was new to him, but that he conjectured at its sinister significance. A little cross-examination on detail would have been fatal to Davies's version; but that was where our strength lay; he dared not cross-examine for fear of suggesting to Davies suspicions which he might never have felt. Indeed, I thought I detected that fear underlying his whole attitude towards us, and it strengthened a conviction which had been growing in me since Grimm's furtive midnight visit, that the secret of this coast was of so important and delicate a nature that rather than attract attention to it at all, overt action against intruders would only be taken in the last resort, and on irrefragable proofs of guilty intention.

Now for our clues. I had come away with two, each the germ of a distinct theory, and both obscured by the prevailing ambiguity. Now, however, as we thumbed the chart and I gave full rein to my fancy, one of them, the idea of Memmert, gained precision and vigour every moment. True, such information as we had about the French wreck and his own connection with it was placed most readily at our disposal by von Brüning; but I took it to be information calculated only to forestall suspicion, since he was aware that we already associated him with Dollmann, possibly also with Grimm, and it was only likely that in the ordinary course we should learn that the trio were jointly concerned in Memmert. So much for the facts; as for the construction he wished us to put on them, I felt sure it was absolutely false. He wished to give us the impression that the buried treasure itself was at the root of any mystery we might have scented. I do not know if the reader fully appreciated that astute suggestion—the hint that secrecy as to results was necessary owing both to the great sum at stake and the flaw in the title, which he had been careful to inform us had passed through British hands. What

he meant to imply was, "Don't be surprised if you have midnight visitors; Englishmen prowling along this coast are suspected of being Lloyds' agents." An ingenious insinuation, which, at the time it was made, had caused me to contemplate a new and much more commonplace solution of our enigma than had ever occurred to us; but it was only a passing doubt, and I dismissed it altogether now.

The fact was, it either explained everything or nothing. As long as we held to our fundamental assumption—that Davies had been decoyed into a death-trap in September—it explained nothing. It was too fantastic to suppose that the exigencies of a commercial speculation would lead to such extremities as that. We were not in the South Sea Islands; nor were we the puppets of a romance. We were in Europe, dealing not only with a Dollmann, but with an officer of the German Imperial Navy, who would scarcely be connected with a commercial enterprise which could conceivably be reduced to forwarding its objects in such a fashion. It was shocking enough to find him in relations with such a scoundrel at all, but it was explicable if the motive were imperial—not so if it were financial. No; to accept the suggestion we must declare the whole quest a mare's nest from beginning to end; the attempt on Davies a delusion of his own fancy, the whole structure we had built on it, baseless.

"Well," I can hear the reader saying, "why not? You, at any rate, were always a little sceptical."

Granted; yet I can truthfully say I scarcely faltered for a moment. Much had happened since Schlei Fiord. I had seen the mechanism of the death-trap; I had lived with Davies for a stormy fortnight, every hour of which had increased my reliance on his seamanship, and also, therefore, on his account of an event which depended largely for its correct interpretation on a balanced nautical judgment. Finally, I had been unconsciously realising, and knew from his mouth to-day, that he had exercised and acted on that judgment in the teeth of personal considerations, which his loyal nature made overwhelming in their force.

What, then, was the meaning of Memmert? At the outset it riveted my attention on the Ems estuary, whose mouth it adjoins. We had always rather neglected the Ems in our calculations; with some excuse, too, for at first sight its importance bears no proportion to that of the three greater estuaries. The latter bear vessels of the largest tonnage and deepest draught to the very quays of Hamburg, Bremerhaven, and the naval dockyard of Wilhelmshaven; while two of them, the Elbe and the Weser, are commerce carriers on the vastest scale for the whole empire. The Ems, on the other hand, only serves towns of the second class. A glance at the chart explains this. You see a most imposing estuary on a grander scale than any of the other three taken singly, with a length of thirty miles and a frontage on the North Sea of ten miles, or one-seventieth, roughly, of the whole seaboard; encumbered by outlying shoals, and blocked in the centre by the island of Borkum, but presenting two fine deep-water channels to the incoming vessel. These roll superbly through enormous sheets of sand, unite and approach the mainland in one stately stream three miles in breadth. But then comes a sad falling off. The navigable fairway shoals and shrinks, middle grounds obstruct it, and shelving foreshores persistently deny it that easy access to the land that alone can create great seaboard cities. All the ports of the Ems are tidal; the harbour of Delfzyl, on the Dutch side, dries at low water, and Emden, the principal German port, can only be reached by a lock and a mile of canal.

But this depreciation is only relative. Judged on its merits, and not by the standard of the Elbe, it is a very important river. Emden is a flourishing and growing port. For shallow craft the stream is navigable far into the interior, where, aided by tributaries and allied canals (notably the connection with the Rhine at Dortmund, then approaching completion), it taps the resources of a great area. Strategically there was still less reason for underrating it. It is one of the great maritime gates of Germany; and it is the western-

most gate, the nearest to Great Britain and France, contiguous to Holland. Its great forked delta presents two yawning breaches in that singular rampart of islets and shoals which masks the German seaboard—a seaboard itself so short, in proportion to the empire's bulk, that, as Davies used to say, "every inch of it must be important." Warships could force these breaches, and so threaten the mainland at one of its few vulnerable points. Quay accommodation is no object to such visitors; intricate navigation no deterrent. Even the heaviest battleships could approach within striking distance of the land, while cruisers and military transports could penetrate to the level of Emden itself. Emden, as Davies had often pointed out, is connected by canal with Wilhelmshaven on the Jade, a strategic canal, designed to carry gunboats as well as merchandise.

Now Memmert was part of the outer rampart; its tapering sickle of sand directly commanded the eastern breach: it *must* be connected with the defence of this breach. No more admirable base could be imagined; self-contained and isolated, yet sheltered, accessible—better than Juist and Borkum. And supposing it were desired to shroud the nature of the work in absolute secrecy, what a pretext lay to hand in the wreck and its buried bullion, which lay in the offing opposite the fairway!

On Memmert was the depôt for the salvage operations. Salvage work, with its dredging and diving, offered precisely the disguise that was needed. It was submarine, and so are some of the most important defences of ports, mines, and dirigible torpedoes. All the details of the story were suggestive: the "small local company"; the "engineer from Bremen" (who, I wondered, was he?); the few shares held by von Brüning, enough to explain his visits; the stores and gear coming from Wilhelmshaven, a naval dockyard.

Try as I would I could not stir Davies's imagination as mine was stirred. He was bent on only seeing the objections, which, of course, were numerous enough. Could secrecy be ensured under pretext of salving a wreck? It must be a secret shared by many—divers, crews of tugs, employés of all sorts. I answered that trade secrets are often preserved under no less difficult conditions, and why not imperial secrets?

"Why the Ems and not the Elbe?" he asked.

"Perhaps," I replied, "the Elbe, too, held similar mysteries." Neuerk Island might, for all we knew, be another Memmert; when cruising in that region we had had no eyes for such things, absorbed in a preconceived theory of our own. Besides, we must not take ourselves too seriously. We were amateurs, not experts in coast defence, and on such vague grounds to fastidiously reject a clue which went so far as this one was to quarrel with our luck. There was a disheartening corollary to this latter argument that in my new-born zeal I shut my eyes to. As amateurs, were we capable of using our clue and gaining exact knowledge of the defences in question? Davies, I knew, felt this strongly, and I think it accounted for his lukewarm view of Memmert more than he was aware. He clung more obstinately than ever to his "channel theory," conscious that it offered the one sort of opportunity of which with his peculiar gifts he was able to take advantage. He admitted, however, that it was under a cloud at present, for if knowledge of the coast-wise navigation were a crime in itself we should scarcely be sitting here now. "It's something to *do* with it, anyhow!" he persisted.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

IMPERIAL ESCORT

MEMMERT gripped me, then, to the exclusion of a rival notion which had given me no little perplexity during the conversation with von Brüning. His reiterated advice that we should lose no time in picking up our anchor

and chain had ended by giving me the idea that he was anxious to get us away from Bensersiel and the mainland. At first I had taken the advice partly as a test of our veracity (as I gave the reader to understand), and partly as an indirect method of lulling any suspicions which Grimm's midnight visit may have caused. Then it struck me that this might be over-subtlety on my part, and the idea recurred when the question of our future plans cropped up, and hampered me in deciding on a course. It returned again when von Brüning offered to tow us out in the evening. It was in my mind when I questioned him as to his business ashore, for it occurred to me that perhaps his landing here was not solely due to a wish to inspect the crew of the *Dulcibella*. Then came his perfectly frank explanation (with its sinister *double entente* for us), coupled with an invitation to me to accompany him to Esens. But, on the principle of "*timeo Danaos*," etc., I instantly smelt a ruse, not that I dreamt that I was to be decoyed into captivity; but if there was anything here which we two might discover in the few hours left to us, it was an ingenious plan to remove the most observant of the two till the hour of departure.

Davies scorned them, and I had felt only a faint curiosity in these insignificant hamlets, influenced, I am afraid, chiefly by a hankering after *terra firma* which the pitiless rigour of his training had been unable to cure.

But it was imprudent to neglect the slightest chance. It was three o'clock, and I think both our brains were beginning to be addled with thinking in close confinement. I suggested that we should finish our council of war in the open, and we both donned oilskins and turned out. The sky had hardened and banked into an even canopy of lead, and the wind drove before it a fine cold rain. You could hear the murmur of the rising flood on the sands outside, but the harbour was high above it still, and the *Dulcibella* and the other boats squatted low in a bed of black slime. Native interest seemed to be at last assuaged, for not a soul was visible on the bank (I cannot call it a quay); but the top of a black sou'-wester with a feather of smoke curling round it showed above the forehatch of the *Kormoran*.

"I wish I could get a look at your cargo, my friend," I thought to myself.

We gazed at Bensersiel in silence.

"There can't be anything *here?*" I said.

"What *can* there be?" said Davies.

"What about that dyke?" I said, with a sudden inspiration.

From the bank we could see all along the coast-line, which is dyked continuously, as I have already said. The dyke was here a substantial brick-faced embankment, very similar, though on a smaller scale, to that which had bordered the Elbe near Cuxhaven, and over whose summit we had seen the snouts of guns.

"I say, Davies," I said, "do you think this coast could be invaded? Along here, I mean, behind these islands?"

Davies shook his head. "I've thought of that," he said. "There's nothing in it. It's just the very last place on earth where a landing would be possible. No transport could get nearer than where the *Blitz* is lying, four miles out."

"Well, you say every inch of this coast is important?"

"Yes, but it's the *water* I mean."

"Well, I want to see that dyke. Let's walk along it."

My mushroom theory died directly I set foot on it. It was the most innocent structure in the world—like a thousand others in Essex and Holland—topped by a narrow path, where we walked in single file with arms akimbo to keep our balance in the gusts of wind. Below us lay the sands on one side and rank fens on the other, interspersed with squares of pasture ringed in with ditches. After half a mile we dropped down and came back by a short circuit inland, following a mazy path—which was mostly right angles and minute plank bridges, till we came to the Esens road. We crossed this and soon after found our way barred by the stream I spoke of. This involved a *détour* to the bridge in the village, and a stealthy avoidance of the post-office, for dread of its garrulous occupant. Then we followed the dyke in the other direction, and ended by a circuit over the

sands, which were fast being covered by the tide, and so back to the yacht.

Nobody appeared to have taken the slightest notice of our movements.

As we walked we had tackled the last question, "What are we to do?" and found very little to say on it. We were to leave to-night (unless the Esens police appeared on the scene), and were committed to sailing direct to Norderney, as the only alternative to duck shooting under the espionage of a "trustworthy" nominee of von Brüning's. Beyond that—vagueness and difficulty of every sort.

At Norderney I should be fettered by my letter. If it seemed to have been opened and it ordered my return, I was limited to a week, or must risk suspicion by staying. Dollmann was away (according to von Brüning), "would probably be back soon"; but how soon? Beyond Norderney lay Memmert. How to probe its secret? The ardour it had roused in me was giving way to a mortifying sense of impotence. The sight of the *Kormoran*, with her crew preparing for sea, was a pointed comment on my diplomacy, and most of all on my ridiculous survey of the dykes. When all was said and done we were *protégés* of von Brüning, and dogged by Grimm. Was it likely they would let us succeed?

The tide was swirling into the harbour in whorls of chocolate froth, and as it rose all Bensersiel, dominated as before by Herr Schenkel, straggled down to the quay to watch the movements of shipping during the transient but momentous hour when the mud-hole was a seaport. The captain's steam-cutter was already afloat, and her sailors busy with sidelights and engines. When it became known that we, too, were to sail, and under such distinguished escort, the excitement intensified.

Again our friend of the customs was spreading out papers to sign, while a throng of helpful Frisians, headed by the twin giants of the post-boat, thronged our decks and made us ready for sea in their own confused fashion. Again we were carried up to the inn and overwhelmed with advice, and warnings, and farewell toasts. Then back again to find the *Dulcibella* afloat, and von Brüning just arrived, cursing the weather and the mud, chaffing Davies, genial and *débonnaire* as ever.

"Stow that mainsail, you won't want it," he said. "I'll tow you right out to Spiekeroog. It's your only anchorage for the night in this wind—under the island, near the *Blitz*, and that would mean a dead beat for you in the dark."

The fact was so true, and the offer so timely, that Davies's faint protests were swept aside in a torrent of ridicule.

"And now I think of it," the commander ended, "I'll make the trip with you, if I may. It'll be pleasanter and drier."

We all three boarded the *Dulcibella*, and then the end came. Our tow-rope was attached, and at half-past six the little launch jumped into the collar, and amidst a demonstration that could not have been more hearty if we had been ambassadors on a visit to a friendly power, we sidled out through the jetties.

It took us more than an hour to cover the five miles to Spiekeroog, for the *Dulcibella* was a heavy load in the stiff head wind, and Davies, though he said nothing, showed undisguised distrust of our tug's capacities. He at once left the helm to me and flung himself on the gear, not resting till every rope was ready to hand, the mainsail reefed, the binnacle lighted, and all ready for setting sail or anchoring at a moment's notice. Our guest watched these precautions with infinite amusement. He was in the highest and most mischievous humour, raining banter on Davies and mock sympathy on me, laughing at our huge compass, heaving the lead himself, startling us with imaginary soundings, and doubting if his men were sober. I offered entertainment and warmth below, but he declined on the ground that Davies would be tempted to cut the tow-rope and make us pass the night on a safe sandbank. Davies took the raillery unmoved. His work done, he took the tiller and sat bareheaded, intent on the launch, the course, the details, and chances of the present. I brought up cigars, and we settled ourselves facing him, our backs to the wind and spray. And so we made the rest of the passage, von Brüning cuddled against me and

the cabin-hatch, alternately shouting a jest at Davies and talking to me in a light and charming vein, with just that shade of patronage that the disparity in our ages warranted, about my time in Germany, places, people, and books I knew, and about life, especially young men's life, in England, a country he had never visited, but hoped to; I responding as well as I could, striving to meet his mood, acquit myself like a man, draw zest instead of humiliation from the irony of our position, but scarcely able to make headway against a numbing sense of defeat and incapacity. A queer thought was haunting me, too, that such skill and judgment as I possessed was slipping from me as we left the land and faced again the rigours of this exacting sea. Davies, I very well knew, was under exactly the opposite spell—a spell which even the reproach of the tow-rope could not annul. His face, in the glow of the binnacle, was beginning to wear that same look of contentment and resolve that I had seen on it that night we had sailed to Kiel from Schlei Fiord. Heaven knows he had more cause for worry than I—a casual comrade in an adventure which was peculiarly his, which meant everything on earth to him; but there he was, washing away perplexity in the salt wind, drawing counsel and confidence from the unfailing source of all his inspirations—the sea.

"Looks happy, doesn't he?" said the captain once. I grunted that he did, ashamed to find how irritated the remark made me.

"You'll remember what I said," he added in my ear.

"Yes," I said. "But I should like to see her. What *is* she like?"

"Dangerous." I could well believe it.

The hull of the *Blitz* loomed up, and a minute later our kedge was splashing overboard and the launch was backing alongside.

"Good-night, gentlemen," said our passenger. "You're safe enough here, and you can run across in ten minutes in the morning and pick up your anchor, if it's there still. Then you've a fair wind west—to England if you like. If you decide to stay a little longer in these parts, and I'm in reach, count on me to help you, to sport or anything else."

We thanked him, shook hands, and he was gone.

"He's a thundering good chap, anyhow," said Davies; and I heartily agreed.

The narrow vigilant life began again at once. We were "safe enough" in a sense, but a warp and a twenty-pound anchor were poor security if the wind backed or increased. Plans for contingencies had to be made, and deck-watches kept till midnight, when the weather seemed to improve, and stars appeared. The glass was rising, so we turned in and slept under the very wing, so to speak, of the Imperial Government.

"Davies," I said, when we were settled in our bunks, "it's only a day's sail to Nordeney, isn't it?"

"With a fair wind, less, if we go outside the islands direct."

"Well, it's settled that we do that to-morrow?"

"I suppose so. We've got to get the anchor first. Good-night."

CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE RUBICON

It was a cold, vaporous dawn, the glass rising, and the wind fallen to a light air still from the north-east. Our creased and sodden sails scarcely answered to it as we crept across the oily swell to Langeoog. "Fogs and calms," Davies prophesied. The *Blitz* was astir when we passed her, and soon after steamed out to sea. Once over the bar, she turned westward and was lost to view in the haze. I should be sorry to have to explain how we found that tiny anchor-buoy, on the expressionless waste of grey. I only know that I hove the lead incessantly while Davies conned, till at last he was grabbing overside with the boat-hook, and there was the buoy on deck. The cable was soon

following it, and finally the rusty monster himself, more loathsome than usual, after his long sojourn in the slime.

"That's all right," said Davies. "Now we can go anywhere."

"Well, it's Norderney, isn't it? We've settled that."

"Yes, I suppose we have. I was wondering whether it wouldn't be shortest to go inside Langeoog after all."

"Surely not," I urged. "The tide's ebbing now, and the light's bad; it's new ground, with a 'watershed' to cross, and we're safe to get aground."

"All right—outside. Ready about." We swung lazily round and headed for the open sea. I record the fact, but in truth Davies might have taken me where he liked, for no land was visible, only a couple of ghostly booms.

"It seems a pity to miss over that channel," said Davies, with a sigh; "just when the *Kormoran* can't watch us." (We had not seen her at all this morning.)

I set myself to the lead again, averse to reopening a barren argument. Grimm had done his work for the present, I felt certain, and was on his way by the shortest road to Norderney and Memmert.

We were soon outside and heading west, our boom squared away and the island sand-dunes just apparent under our lee. Then the breeze died to the merest draught, and left us rolling inert in a long swell. Consumed with impatience to get on I saw fatality in this failure of wind, after a fortnight of unprofitable meanderings, when we had generally had too much of it, and always enough for our purpose. I tried to read below, but the vile squirting of the centre-board drove me up.

"Can't we go any faster?" I burst out once. I felt that there ought to be a pyramid of gauzy canvas aloft, spinnakers, flying jibs, and what not.

"I don't go in for speed," said Davies, shortly. He loyally did his best to "shove her" along, but puffs and calms were the rule all day, and it was only by towing in the dinghy for two hours in the afternoon that we covered the length of Langeoog, and crept before dark to an anchorage behind Baltrum, its slug-shaped neighbour on the west. Strictly, I believe, we should have kept the sea all night; but I had not the grit to suggest that course, and Davies was only too glad of an excuse for threading the shoals of the Accumer Ee on a rising tide. The atmosphere had been slowly clearing as the day wore on; but we had scarcely anchored ten minutes before a blanket of white fog, rolling in from seaward, swallowed us up. Davies was already afield in the dinghy, and I had to guide him back with a foghorn, whose music roused hosts of sea birds from the surrounding flats, and brought them wheeling and complaining round us, a weird invisible chorus to my mournful solo.

The fog hung heavy still at daybreak on the 20th, but dispersed partially under a catspaw from the south about eight o'clock, in time for us to traverse the boomed channel behind Baltrum, before the tide left the watershed.

"We shan't get far to-day," said Davies, with philosophy. "And this sort of thing may go on for any time. It's a regular autumn anti-cyclone—glass thirty point five and steady. That gale was the last of a stormy equinox."

We took the inside route as a matter of course to-day. It was now the shortest to Norderney harbour, and scarcely less intricate than the Wichter Ee, which appeared to be almost totally blocked by banks, and is, in fact, the most impassable of all these outlets to the North Sea. But, as I say, this sort of navigation, always puzzling to me, was utterly bewildering in hazy weather. Any attempt at orientation made me giddy. So I slaved at the lead, varying my labour with a fierce bout of kedge-work when we grounded somewhere. I had two rests before two o'clock, one of an hour, when we ran into a patch of windless fog, another of a few moments when Davies said, "There's Norderney!" and I saw, surmounting a long slope of weedy sand, still wet with the receding sea, a cluster of sandhills exactly like a hundred others I had seen of late, but fraught with a new and unique interest.

The usual formula, "What have you got now?" checked my reverie, and "Helm's a-lee," ended it for the time. We tacked on (for the wind had headed us) in very shoal water.

Suddenly Davies said: "Is that a boat ahead?"

"Do you mean that galliot?" I asked. I could plainly distinguish one of those familiar craft about half a mile away, just within the limit of vision.

"The *Kormoran*, do you think?" I added. Davies said nothing, but grew inattentive to his work. "Barely four," from me passed unnoticed, and we touched once, but swung off under some play of the current. Then came abruptly, "Stand by the anchor. Let go," and we brought up in mid-stream of the narrow creek we were following. I triced up the main-tack, and stowed the head-sails unaided. When I had done Davies was still gazing to windward through his binoculars, and, to my astonishment, I noticed that his hands were trembling violently. I had never seen this happen before, even at moments when a false turn of the wrist meant death on a surf-battered bank.

"What is it?" I asked; "are you cold?"

"That little boat," he said. I gazed to windward, too, and now saw a scrap of white in the distance, in sharp relief.

"Small standing lug and jib; it's her, right enough," said Davies to himself, in a sort of nervous stammer.

"Who? What?"

"*Medusa's* dinghy."

He handed, or rather pushed, me the glasses, still gazing.

"Dollmann?" I exclaimed.

"No, it's *hers*—the one she always sails. She's come to meet m—, us."

Through the glasses the white scrap became a graceful little sail, squared away for the light following breeze. An angle of the creek hid the hull, then it glided into view. Someone was sitting aft steering, man or woman I could not say, for the sail hid most of the figure. For full two minutes—two long, pregnant minutes—we watched it in silence. The damp air was fogging the lenses, but I kept them to my eyes; for I did not want to look at Davies. At last I heard him draw a deep breath, straighten himself up, and give one of his characteristic "h'ms." Then he turned briskly aft, cast off the dinghy's painter, and pulled her up alongside.

"You come too," he said, jumping in, and fixing the rowlocks. (His hands were steady again.) I laughed, and shoved the dinghy off.

"I'd rather you did," he said, defiantly.

"I'd rather stay. I'll tidy up, and put the kettle on." Davies had taken a half-stroke, but paused.

"She oughtn't to come aboard," he said.

"She might like to," I suggested. "Chilly day, long way from home, common courtesy——"

"Carruthers," said Davies, "if she comes aboard, please remember that she's outside this business. There are no clues to be got from *her*."

A little lecture which would have nettled me more if I had not been exultantly telling myself that, once and for all, for good or ill, the Rubicon was passed.

"It's your affair this time," I said; "run it as you please."

He sculled away with vigorous strokes. "Just as he is," I thought to myself: bare head, beaded with fog-dew, ancient oilskin coat (only one button); grey jersey; grey woollen trousers (like a deep-sea fisherman's) stuffed into long boots. A vision of his antitype, the Cowes Philanderer, crossed me for a second. As to his face—well, I could only judge by it, and marvel, that he was gripping his dilemma by either horn, as firmly as he gripped his sculls.

I watched the two boats converging. They would meet in the natural course about three hundred yards away, but a hitch occurred. First, the sail-boat checked and slewed; "aground," I concluded. The row-boat leapt forward still; then checked, too. From both a great splashing of sculls floated across the still air, then silence. The summit of the watershed, a physical Rubicon, prosaic and slimy, had still to be crossed, it seemed. But it could be evaded. Both boats headed for the northern side of the creek: two figures were out on the brink, hauling on two painters. Then Davies was striding over the sand, and a girl—I could see her now—was coming to meet him. And then I thought it was time to go below and tidy up.

Nothing on earth could have made the *Dulcibella's* saloon a worthy reception-room for a lady. I could only use

hurried efforts to make it look its best by plying a bunch of cotton-waste and a floor-brush; by pitching into racks and lockers the litter of pipes, charts, oddments of apparel, and so on, that had a way of collecting afresh, however recently we had tidied up; by neatly arranging our demoralised library, and by lighting the stove and veiling the table under a clean white cloth.

I suppose about twenty minutes had elapsed, and I was scrubbing fruitlessly at the smoky patch on the ceiling, when I heard the sound of oars and voices outside. I threw the cotton-waste into the fo'c'sle, made an onslaught on my hands, and then mounted the companion ladder. Our own dinghy was just rounding up alongside, Davies sculling in the bows, facing him in the stern a young girl in a grey Tam-o'-shanter, loose waterproof jacket and dark serge skirt, the latter, to be frigidly accurate, disclosing a pair of workmanlike rubber boots, which, *mutatis mutandis*, were very like those Davies was wearing. Her hair, like his, was spangled with moisture, and her rose-brown skin struck a note of delicious colour against the sullen Stygian background.

"There he is," said Davies. Never did his "meiner Freund, Carruthers," sound so pleasantly in my ears; never so discordantly the "Fräulein Dollmann" that followed it. Every syllable of the four was a lie. Two honest English eyes were looking up into mine; an honest English hand—is this insular nonsense? Perhaps so, but I stick to it—a brown, firm hand—no, not so very small, my sentimental reader—was clasping mine. Of course I had strong reasons, apart from the racial instinct, for thinking her to be English, but I believe that if I had had none at all I should at any rate have congratulated Germany on a clever bit of plagiarism. By her voice, when she spoke, I knew that she must have talked German habitually from childhood; diction and accent were faultless, at least to my English ear; but the native constitutional ring was wanting.

She came on board. There was a hollow discussion first about time and weather, but it ended as we all in our hearts wished it to end. None of us uttered our real scruples. Mine, indeed, were too new and rudimentary to be worth uttering, so I said common-sense things about tea and warmth; but I began to think about my compact with Davies.

"Just for a few minutes, then," she said.

I held out my hand and swung her up. She gazed round the deck and rigging with profound interest—a breathless, hungry interest—touching to see.

"You've seen her before, haven't you?" I said.

"I've not been on board before," she answered.

This struck me in passing as odd; but then I had only too few details from Davies about his days at Norderney in September.

"Of course, *that* is what puzzled me," she exclaimed, suddenly, pointing to the mizzen. "I knew there was something different."

Davies had belayed the painter, and now had to explain the origin of the mizzen. This was a cumbrous process, and his hearer's attention soon wandered from the subject and became centred in him—his was already more than half in her—and the result was a golden opportunity for the discerning onlooker. It was very brief, but I made the most of it; buried deep a few regrets, did a little heartfelt penance, told myself I had been a cynical fool not to have foreseen this, and faced the new situation with a sinking heart; I am not ashamed to admit that, for I was fond of Davies, and I was keen about the quest.

She had never been a guilty agent in that attempt on Davies. Had she been an unconscious tool or only an unwilling one? If the latter, did she know the secret we were seeking? In the last degree unlikely, I decided. But, true to the compact, whose importance I now fully appreciated, I flung aside my diplomatic weapons, recoiling, as strongly, or nearly as strongly, let us say, from any effort direct or indirect to gain information from such a source. It was not our fault if by her own conversation and behaviour she gave us some idea of how matters stood. Davies already knew more than I did.

We spent a few minutes on deck while she asked eager questions about

our build and gear and seaworthiness, with a quaint mixture of professional acumen and personal curiosity.

"How *did* you manage alone that day?" she asked Davies, suddenly.

"Oh, it was quite safe," was the reply. "But it's much better to have a friend."

She looked at me; and—well, I would have died for Davies there and then.

"Father said you would be safe," she remarked, with decision—a slight excess of decision, I thought. And at that turned to some rope or block and pursued her questioning. She found the compass impressive, and the trappings of that hateful centre-board had a peculiar fascination for her. Was this the way we did it in England? was her constant query.

Yet, in spite of a superficial freedom, we were all shy and constrained. The descent below was a welcome diversion, for we should have been less than human if we had not extracted some spontaneous fun from the humours of the saloon. I went down first to see about the tea, leaving them struggling for mutual comprehension over the theory of an English lifeboat. They soon followed, and I can see her now stooping in at the doorway, treading delicately, like a kitten, past the obstructive centre-board to a place on the starboard sofa, then taking in her surroundings with a timid rapture that broke into delight at all the primitive arrangements and dingy amenities of our den. She explored the cavernous recesses of the Rippingille, fingered the duck-guns and the miscellany in the racks, and peeped into the fo'c'sle with dainty awe. Everything was a source of merriment, from our cramped attitudes to the painful deficiency of spoons and the "yachtiness" (there is no other word to describe it) of the bread, which had been bought at Bensersiel, and had suffered from incarceration and the climate. This fact came out, and led to some questions, while we waited for the water to boil, about the gale and our visit there. The topic, a pregnant one for us, appeared to have no special significance to her. At the mention of von Brüning she showed no emotion of any sort; on the contrary, she went out of her way, from an innocent motive that anyone could have guessed, to show that she could talk about him with dispassionate detachment.

"He came to see us when you were here last, didn't he?" she said to Davies. "He often comes. He goes with father to Memmert sometimes. You know about Memmert? They are diving for money out of an old wreck."

Yes, we had heard about it.

"Of course you have. Father is a director of the company, and Commander von Brüning takes great interest in it; they took me down in a diving-bell once."

I murmured, "Indeed!", and Davies sawed laboriously at the bread. She must have misconstrued our sheepish silence, for she stopped and drew herself up with just a touch of momentary hauteur, utterly lost on Davies. I could have laughed aloud at this transient little comedy of errors.

"Did you see any gold?" said Davies at last, with husky solemnity. Something had to be said or we should defeat our own end; but I let him say it. He had not my faith in Memmert.

"No, only mud and timber—oh, I forgot——"

"You mustn't betray the company's secrets," I said, laughing; "Commander von Brüning wouldn't tell us a word about the gold." ("There's self-denial!" I said to myself.)

"Oh, I don't think it matters much," she answered, laughing too. "You are only visitors."

"That's all," I remarked, demurely. "Just passing travellers."

"You will stop at Norderney?" she said, with naïve anxiety. "Herr Davies said——"

I looked to Davies; it was his affair. Fair and square came his answer, in blunt dog-German.

"Yes, of course, we shall. I should like to see your father again."

Up to this moment I had been doubtful of his final decision; for ever since our explanation at Bensersiel I had had the feeling that I was holding his nose to a very cruel grindstone. This straight word, clear and direct, beyond anything I had hoped for, brought me to my senses and showed me that his mind had been working far in advance of mine; and more, shaping a double purpose that I had never dreamt of.

"My father?" said Fräulein Dollmann; "yes, I am sure he will be very glad to see you."

There was no conviction in her tone, and her eyes were distant and troubled.

"He's not at home now, is he?" asked.

"How did you know?" (a little maidenly confusion). "Oh, Commander von Brüning."

I might have added that it had been clear as daylight all along that this visit was in the nature of an escapade of which her father might not approve. tried to say "I won't tell," without words, and may have succeeded.

"I told Mr. Davies when we first met," she went on. "I expect him back very soon — to-morrow in fact; he wrote from Amsterdam. He left me at Hamburg and has been away since. Of course, he will not know your yacht is back again. I think he expected Mr. Davies would stay in the Baltic, as the season was so late. But—but I am sure he will be glad to see you."

"Is the *Medusa* in harbour?" said Davies.

"Yes; but we are not living on her now. We are at our villa in the Schwannallée — my stepmother and I, that is." She added some details, and Davies gravely pencilled down the address on a leaf of the log-book; formality which somehow seemed to regularise the present position.

"We shall be at Norderney to-morrow," he said.

Meanwhile the kettle was boiling merrily, and I made the tea—cocoa, I should say, for the menu was changed in deference to our visitor's tastes. "This *is* fun!" she said. And by common consent we abandoned ourselves, three youthful, hungry mariners, to the enjoyment of this impromptu picnic. Such a chance might never occur again—*carpamus diem*.

But the banquet was never celebrated. As at Belshazzar's feast, there was a writing on the wall; no supernatural inscription, but just a printed name; an English surname with title and initials, in cheap gilt lettering on the back of an old book; a silent, sneering witness of our snug party. The catastrophe came and passed so suddenly that at the time I had scarcely even an inkling of what caused it; but I know now that this is how it happened. Our visitor was sitting at the forward end of the starboard sofa, close to the bulkhead. Davies and I were opposite her. Across the bulkhead, on a level with our heads, ran the bookshelf, whose contents, remember, I had carefully straightened only half an hour ago, little dreaming of the consequence. Some trifle, probably the log-book which Davies had reached down from the shelf, called her attention to the rest of our library. While busied with the cocoa I heard her spelling out some titles, fingering leaves, and twitting Davies with the little care he took of his books. Suddenly there was a silence which made me look up, to see a startled and pitiful change in her. She was staring at Davies with wide eyes and parted lips, a burning flush mounting to her forehead, and such an expression on her face as a sleep-walker might wear, who wakes in fear he knows not where.

Half her mind was far away, labouring to construe some hideous dream of the past; half was in the present, cringing before some sickening reality. She remained so for perhaps ten seconds, and then—plucky girl that she was—she mastered herself, looked deliberately round and up with a circular glance, strangely in the manner of Davies himself, and spoke. How late it was, she must be going—her boat was not safe. At the same time she rose to go, or rather slid herself along the sofa, for rising was impossible. We sat like mannerless louts, in blank amazement. Davies at the outset had said, "What's the matter?" in plain English, and then relapsed into stupefaction. I recovered myself the first, and protested in some awkward fashion about the cocoa, the time, the absence of fog. In trying to answer, her self-possession broke down, poor child, and her retreat became a blind flight, like that of a wounded animal, while every sordid circumstance seemed to accentuate her panic.

She tilted the corner of the table in leaving the sofa and spilt cocoa over her skirt; she knocked her head with painful force against the sharp lintel of the doorway, and stumbled on the

steps of the ladder. I was close behind, but when I reached the deck she was already on the counter hauling up the dinghy. She had even jumped in and laid hands on the sculls before any check came in her precipitate movements. Now there occurred to her the patent fact that the dinghy was ours, and that someone must accompany her to bring it back.

"Davies will row you over," I said.

"Oh no, thank you," she stammered. "If you will be so kind, Herr Carruthers. It is your turn. No, I mean, I want——"

"Go on," said Davies to me in English.

I stepped into the dinghy and motioned to take the sculls from her. She seemed not to see me, and pushed off while Davies handed down her jacket, which she had left in the cabin. Neither of us tried to better the situation by conventional apologies. It was left to her, at the last moment, to make a show of excusing herself, an attempt so brave and yet so wretchedly lame that I tingled all over with hot shame. She only made matters worse, and Davies interrupted her.

"*Auf Wiedersehen,*" he said, simply.

She shook her head, did not even offer her hand, and pulled away; Davies turned sharp round and went below.

There was now no muddy Rubicon to obstruct us, for the tide had risen a good deal, and the sands were covering. I offered again to take the sculls, but she took no notice and rowed on, so that I was a silent passenger on the stern seat till we reached her boat, a spruce little yacht's gig, built to the native model, with a spoon-bow and tiny lee-boards. It was already afloat, but riding quite safely to a rope and a little grapnel, which she proceeded to haul in.

"It was quite safe after all, you see," I said.

"Yes, but I could not stay. Herr Carruthers, I want to say something to you." (I knew it was coming; von Brüning's warning over again.) "I made a mistake just now; it is no use your calling on us to-morrow."

"Why not?"

"You will not see my father."

"I thought you said he was coming back?"

"Yes, by the morning steamer; but he will be very busy."

"We can wait. We have several days to spare, and we have to call for letters anyhow."

"You must not delay on our account. The weather is very fine at last. It would be a pity to lose a chance of a smooth voyage to England. The season——"

"We have no fixed plans. Davies wants to get some shooting."

"My father will be much occupied."

"We can see *you*."

I insisted on being obtuse, for though this fencing with an unstrung girl was hateful work, the quest was at stake. We were going to Norderney, come what might, and sooner or later we must see Dollmann. It was no use promising not to. I had given no pledge to von Brüning, and I would give none to her. The only alternative was to violate the compact (which the present fiasco had surely weakened), speak out, and try and make an ally of her. Against her own father? I shrank from the responsibility and counted the cost of failure—certain failure, to judge by her conduct. She began to hoist her lug-sail in a dazed, shiftless fashion, while our two boats drifted slowly to leeward.

"Father might not like it," she said, so low and from such tremulous lips that I scarcely caught her words. "He does not like foreigners much. I am afraid . . . he did not want to see Herr Davies again."

"But I thought——"

"It was wrong of me to come aboard—I suddenly remembered; but I could not tell Herr Davies."

"I see," I answered. "I will tell him."

"Yes, that he must not come near us."

"He will understand. I know he will be very sorry, but," I added, firmly, "you can trust him implicitly to do the right thing." And how I prayed that this would content her! Thank Heaven, it did.

"Yes," she said, "I am afraid I did not say good-bye to him. You will do so?" She gave me her hand.

"One thing more," I added, holding it, "nothing had better be said about this meeting?"

"No, no, nothing. It must never be known."

I let go the gig's gunwale and watched her tighten her sheet and make a tack or two to windward. Then I rowed back to the *Dulcibella* as hard as I could.

CHAPTER TWENTY

THE LITTLE DRAB BOOK

I FOUND Davies at the cabin table, surrounded with a litter of books. The shelf was empty, and its contents were tossed about among the cups and on the floor. We both spoke together.

"Well, what was it?"

"Well, what did she say?"

I gave way, and told my story briefly. He listened in silence, drumming on the table with a book which he held.

"It's not good-bye," he said. "But I don't wonder; look here!" and he held out to me a small volume, whose appearance was quite familiar to me, if its contents were less so. As I noted in an early chapter, Davies's library, excluding tide-tables, "pilots," etc., was limited to two classes of books, those on naval warfare, and those on his own hobby, cruising in small yachts. He had six or seven of the latter, including Knight's "Falcon in the Baltic," Cowper's "Sailing Tours," Macmullen's "Down Channel," and other less-known stories of adventurous travel. I had scarcely done more than look into some of them at off-moments, for our life had left no leisure for reading. This particular volume was—no, I had better not describe it too fully; but I will say that it was old and unpretentious, bound in cheap cloth of a rather antiquated style, with a title which showed it to be a guide for yachtsmen to a certain British estuary. A white label partly scratched away bore the legend "3*d*." I had glanced at it once or twice with no special interest.

"Well?" I said, turning over some yellow pages.

"Dollmann!" cried Davies. "Dollmann wrote it." I turned to the title-page, and read: "By Lieut. X——, R.N." The name itself conveyed nothing to me, but I began to understand. Davies went on: "The name's on the back, too—and I'm certain it's the last she looked at."

"But how do you know?"

"And there's the man himself. Ass that I am not to have seen it before! Look at the frontispiece."

It was a sorry piece of illustration of the old-fashioned sort, lacking definition and finish, but effective notwithstanding; for it was evidently the reproduction, though a cheap and imperfect process, of a photograph. It represented a small yacht at anchor below some woods, with the owner standing on deck in his shirt sleeves: a well-knit, powerful man, young, of middle height, clean shaved. There appeared to be nothing remarkable about the face: the portrait being on too small a scale, and the expression, such as it was, being of the fixed "photographic" character.

"How do you know him? You said he was fifty, with a greyish beard."

"By the shape of his head; that hasn't changed. Look how it widens at the top, and then flattens—sort of wedge shaped—with a high, steep forehead; you'd hardly notice it in that" (the points were not very noticeable, but I saw what Davies meant). "The height and figure are right, too; and the dates are about right. Look at the bottom."

Underneath the picture was the name of a yacht and a date. The publisher's date on the title-page was the same.

"Sixteen years ago," said Davies. "He looks thirty odd in that, doesn't he? And fifty now."

"Let's work the thing out. Sixteen years ago he was still an Englishman, an officer in Her Majesty's Navy. Now he's a German. At some time between this and then, I suppose, he came to grief—disgrace, flight, exile. When did it happen?"

"They've been here three years; von Brüning said so."

"It was long before that. She has talked German from a child. What's her age, do you think—nineteen or twenty?"

"About that."

"Say she was four when this book was published. The crash must have come not long after."

"And they've been hiding in Germany since."

"Is this a well-known book?"

"I never saw another copy; picked this up on a second-hand bookstall for threepence."

"She looked at it, you say?"

"Yes, I'm certain of it."

"Was she never on board you in September?"

"No; I asked them both, but Dollmann made excuses."

"But *he*—*he* came on board? You told me so."

"Once; he asked himself to breakfast on the first day. By Jove! yes; you mean he saw the book?"

"It explains a good deal."

"It explains everything."

We fell into deep reflection for a minute or two.

"Do you really mean *everything?*" I said. "In that case let's sail straight away and forget the whole affair. He's only some poor devil with a past, whose secret you stumbled on, and, half mad with fear, he tried to silence you. But you don't want revenge, so it's no business of ours. We can ruin him if we like; but is it worth it?"

"You don't mean a word you're saying," said Davies, "though I know why you say it; and many thanks, old chap. I didn't mean 'everything.' He's plotting with Germans, or why did Grimm spy on us, and von Brüning cross-examine us? We've got to find out what he's at, as well as who he is. And as to her—what do you think of her now?"

I made my *amende* heartily. "Innocent and ignorant," was my verdict. "Ignorant, that is, of her father's treasonable machinations; but aware, clearly, that they were English refugees with a past to hide." I said other things, but they do not matter. "Only," I concluded, "it makes the dilemma infinitely worse."

"There's no dilemma at all," said Davies. "You said at Bensersiel that we couldn't hurt him without hurting her. Well, all I can say is, we've *got* to. The time to cut and run, if ever, was when we sighted her dinghy. I had a baddish minute then."

"She's given us a clue or two after all."

"It wasn't our fault. To refuse to have her on board would have been to give our show away; and the very fact that she's given us clues decides the matter. She mustn't suffer for it."

"What will she do?"

"Stick to her father, I suppose."

"And what shall we do?"

"I don't know yet; how can I know? It depends," said Davies, slowly. "But the point is, that we have two objects, equally important—yes, equally, by Jove!—to scotch him, and save her."

There was a pause.

"That's rather a large order," I observed. "Do you realise that at this very moment we have probably gained the first object? If we went home now, walked into the Admiralty and laid our facts before them, what would be the result?"

"The Admiralty!" said Davies, with ineffable scorn.

"Well, Scotland Yard, too, then. Both of them want our man, I dare say. It would be strange if between them they couldn't dislodge him, and, incidentally, either discover what's going on here or draw such attention to this bit of coast as to make further secrecy impossible."

"It's out of the question to let her betray her father, and then run away! Besides, we don't know enough, and they mightn't believe us. It's a cowardly course, however you look at it."

"Oh! that settles it," I answered, hastily. "Now I want to go back over the facts. When did you first see her?"

"That first morning."

"She wasn't in the saloon the night before?"

"No; and he didn't mention her."

"You would have gone away next morning if he hadn't called?"

"Yes; I told you so."

"He allowed her to persuade you to make that voyage with them?"

"I suppose so."

"But he sent her below when the pilotage was going on?"

"Of course."

"She said just now, 'Father said you would be safe.' What had you been saying to her?"

"It was when I met her on the sand. (By the way, it wasn't a chance meeting; she had been making inquiries and heard about us from a skipper who had seen the yacht near Wangeroog, and she had been down this way before.) She asked at once about that day, and began apologising, rather awkwardly, you know, for their rudeness in not having waited for me at

Cuxhaven. Her father found he must get on to Hamburg at once."

"But you didn't go to Cuxhaven; you told her that? What exactly *did* you tell her? This is important."

"I was in a fearful fix, not knowing what *he* had told her. So I said something vague, and then she asked the very question von Brüning did, 'Wasn't there a *schrecklich* sea round the Scharhorn?'"

"She didn't know you took the short cut, then?"

"No; he hadn't dared to tell her."

"She knew that *they* took it?"

"Yes. He couldn't possibly have hidden that. She would have known by the look of the sea from the portholes, the shorter time, etc."

"But when the *Medusa* hove to and he shouted to you to follow him—didn't she understand what was happening?"

"No, evidently not. Mind you, she couldn't possibly have heard what we said, in that weather, from below. I couldn't cross-question her, but it was clear enough what she thought; namely, that he had hove to for exactly the opposite reason, to say *he* was taking the short cut, and that I wasn't to attempt to follow him."

"That's why she laid stress on *waiting* for you at Cuxhaven?"

"Of course; mine would have been the longer passage."

"She had no notion of foul play?"

"None—that I could see. After all, there I was, alive and well."

"But she was remorseful for having induced you to sail at all that day, and for not having waited to see you arrived safely."

"That's about it."

"Now what did you say about Cuxhaven?"

"Nothing. I let her understand that I went there, and, not finding them, went on to the Baltic by the Eider river, having changed my mind about the ship canal."

"Now, what about her voyage back from Hamburg? Was she alone?"

"No; the stepmother joined her."

"Did she say she had inquired about you at Brunsbüttel?"

"No; I suppose she didn't like to. And there was no need, because my taking the Eider explained it."

I reflected. "You're sure she hadn't a notion that you took the short cut?"

"Quite sure; but she may guess it now. She guessed foul play by seeing that book."

"Of course she did; but I was thinking of something else. There are two stories afloat now—yours to von Brüning, the true one, that you followed the *Medusa* to the short cut; and Dollmann's to her, that you went round the Scharhorn. That's evidently his version of the affair—the version he would have given if you had been drowned and inquiries were ever made; the version he would have sworn his crew to if they discovered the truth."

"But he must drop that yarn when he knows I'm alive and back again."

"Yes; but meanwhile, supposing von Brüning sees him *before* he knows you're back again, and wants to find out the truth about that incident. If I were von Brüning I should say, 'By the way, what's become of that young Englishman you decoyed away to the Baltic?' Dollmann would give his version, and von Brüning, having heard ours, would know he was lying, and had tried to drown you."

"Does it matter? He must know already that Dollmann's a scoundrel."

"So we've been supposing; but we may be wrong. We're still in the dark as to Dollmann's position towards these Germans. They may not even know he's English, or they may know that and not know his real name and past. What effect your story will have on their relations with him we can't forecast. But I'm clear about one thing, that it's our paramount interest to maintain the *status quo* as long as we can, to minimise the danger you ran that day, and act as witnesses in his defence. We can't do that if his story and yours don't tally. The discrepancy will not only damn him (that may be immaterial), but it will throw doubt on us."

"Why?"

"Because if the short cut was so dangerous that he dared not own to having led you to it, it was dangerous enough to make you suspect foul play; the very supposition we want to avoid. We want to be thought mere travellers, with no scores to wipe out, and no secrets to pry after."

"Well, what do you propose?"

"Hitherto I believe we stand fairly well. Let's assume we hoodwinked von Brüning at Bensersiel, and base our policy on that assumption. It follows that we must show Dollmann at the earliest possible moment that you *have* come back, and give him time to revise his tactics before he commits himself. Now——"

"But *she'll* tell him we're back," interrupted Davies.

"I don't think so. We've just agreed to keep this afternoon's episode a secret. She expects never to see us again."

"Now, he comes to-morrow by the morning boat, she said. What did that mean? Boat from where?"

"I know. From Norddeich on the mainland opposite. There's a railway there from Norden, and a steam ferry crosses to the island."

"At what time?"

"Your Bradshaw will tell us—here it is: 'Winter Service, 8.30 a.m., due at 9.5.'"

"Let's get away at once."

We had a tussle with the tide at first but once over the watershed the channel improved, and the haze lightened gradually. A lighthouse appeared among the sand-dunes on the island shore, and before darkness fell we dimly saw the spires and roofs of a town, and two long black piers stretching out southwards. We were scarcely a mile away when we lost our wind altogether, and had to anchor. Determined to reach our destination that night we waited till the ebb stream made, and then towed the yacht with the dinghy. In the course of this a fog dropped on us suddenly, just as it had yesterday. I was towing at the time, and, of course, stopped short; but Davies shouted to me from the tiller to go on, that he could manage with the lead and compass. And the end of it was that, at about nine o'clock, we anchored safely in the five-fathom roadstead, close to the eastern pier, as a short reconnaissance proved to us. It had been a little masterpiece of adroit seamanship.

There was utter stillness till our chain rattled down, when a muffled shout came from the direction of the pier, and soon we heard a boat groping out to us. It was a polite but sleepy port-officer, who asked in a perfunctory way for our particulars, and when he heard them, remembered the *Dulcibella's* previous visit

"Where are you bound to?" he asked.

"England—sooner or later," said Davies.

The man laughed derisively. "Not this year," he said; "there will be fogs for another week; it is always so, and then storms. Better leave your yawl here. Dues will be only sixpence a month for you."

"I'll think about it," said Davies. "Good night."

The man vanished like a ghost in the thick night.

"Is the post-office open?" I called after him.

"No; eight to-morrow," came back out of the fog.

We were too excited to sup in comfort, or sleep in peace, or to do anything but plan and speculate. Never till this night had we talked with absolute mutual confidence, for Davies broke down the last barriers of reserve and let me see his whole mind. He loved this girl and he loved his country, two simple passions which for the time absorbed his whole moral capacity. There was no room left for casuistry. To weigh one passion against the other, with the discordant voices of honour and expedience dinning in his ears, had too long involved him in fruitless torture. Both were right; neither could be surrendered. If the facts showed them irreconcilable, *tant pis pour les faits*. A way must be found to satisfy both or neither.

I should have been a spiritless dog if I had not risen to his mood. But in truth his cutting of the knot was at this juncture exactly what appealed to me. I, too, was tired of vicarious casuistry, and the fascination of our enterprise, intensified by the discovery of that afternoon, had never been so strong in me. Not to be insincere, I cannot pretend that I viewed the situation with his single mind. My philosophy when I left London was of a very worldly sort, and no one can change his temperament in three weeks. I plainly said as much to Davies, and indeed took perverse satisfaction in

stating with brutal emphasis some social truths which bore on this attachment of his to the daughter of an outlaw. Truths I call them, but I uttered them more by rote than by conviction, and he heard them unmoved. And meanwhile I snatched recklessly at his own solution. If it imparted into our adventure a strain of crazy chivalry more suited to knights-errant of the middle ages than to sober modern youths—well, thank Heaven, I was not too sober, and still young enough to snatch at that fancy with an ardour of imagination, if not of character; perhaps, too, of character, for Galahads are not so common but that ordinary folk must needs draw courage from their example and put something of a blind trust in their tenfold strength.

To reduce a romantic ideal to a working plan is a very difficult thing.

"We shall have to argue backwards," I said. "What is to be the final stage? Because that must govern the others."

There was only one answer—to get Dollmann, secrets and all, daughter and all, away from Germany altogether. So only could we satisfy the double aim we had set before us. What a joy it is, when beset with doubts, to find a bed-rock necessity, however unattainable! We fastened on this one and reasoned back from it. The first lesson was that, however many and strong were the enemies we had to contend with, our sole overt foe must be Dollmann. The issue of the struggle must be known only to ourselves and him. If we won, and found out "what he was at," we must at all costs conceal our success from his German friends, and detach him from them before he was compromised. (You will remark that to blithely accept this limitation showed a very sanguine spirit in us.) The next question, how to find out what he was at, was a deal more thorny. If it had not been for the discovery of Dollmann's identity, we should have found it as hard a nut to crack as ever. But this discovery was illuminating. It threw into relief two methods of action which hitherto we had been hazily seeking to combine, seesawing between one and the other, each of us influenced at different times by different motives. One was to rely on independent research; the other to extort the secret from Dollmann direct, by craft or threats. The moral of to-day was to abandon the first and embrace the second.

The prospects of independent research were not a whit better than before. There were only two theories in the field, the channel theory and the Memmert theory. The former languished for lack of corroboration; the latter also appeared to be weakened. To Fräulein Dollmann the wreck-works were evidently what they purported to be, and nothing more. This fact in itself was unimportant, for it was clear as crystal that she was no party to her father's treacherous intrigues, if he was engaged in such. But if Memmert was his sphere for them, it was disconcerting to find her so familiar with that sphere, lightly talking of a descent in a diving-bell—hinting, too, that the mystery as to results was only for local consumption. Nevertheless, the charm of Memmert as the place we had traced Grimm to, and as the only tangible clue we had obtained, was still very great. The really cogent objection was the insuperable difficulty, known and watched as we were, of learning its significance. If there was anything important to see there we should never be allowed to see it, while by trying and failing we risked everything. It was on this point that the last of all misunderstandings between me and Davies was dissipated. At Bensersiel he had been influenced more than he owned by my arguments about Memmert; but, at that time (as I hinted) he was biassed by a radical prejudice. The channel theory had become a sort of religion with him, promising double salvation—not only avoidance of the Dollmanns, but success in the quest by methods in which he was past master. To have to desert it and resort to spying on naval defences was an idea he dreaded and distrusted. It was not the morality of the course that bothered him. He was far too clear-headed to blink at the essential fact that at heart we were spies on a foreign power in time of peace, or to salve his conscience by specious distinctions as to our mode of operation. The foreign power to him was Dollmann,

a traitor. There was his final justification, fearlessly adopted and held to the last. It was rather that, knowing his own limitations, his whole nature shrank from the sort of action entailed by the Memmert theory. And there was strong common sense in his antipathy.

So much for independent research.

On the other hand the road was now clear for the other method. Davies no longer feared to face the imbroglio at Norderney; and that day fortune had given us a new and potent weapon against Dollmann; precisely how potent we could not tell, for we had only a glimpse of his past, and his exact relations with the Government were unknown to us. But we knew who he was. Using this knowledge with address, could we not wring the rest from him? Feel our way, of course, be guided by his own conduct, but in the end strike hard and stake everything on the stroke? Such at any rate was our scheme to-night. Later, tossing in my bunk, I bethought me of the little drab book. lit a candle, and fetched it. A preface explained that it had been written during a spell of two months' leave from naval duty, and expressed a hope that it might be of service to Corinthian sailors. The style was unadorned, but scholarly and pithy. There was no trace of the writer's individuality, save a certain subdued relish in describing banks and shoals, which reminded me of Davies himself. For the rest, I found the book dull, and, in fact, it sent me to sleep.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

BLINDFOLD TO MEMMERT

"HERE she comes," said Davies. It was nine o'clock on the next day, October 22nd, and we were on deck waiting for the arrival of the steamer from Norddeich. There was no change in the weather—still the same stringent cold, with a high barometer, and only fickle flaws of air; but the morning was gloriously clear, except for a wreath or two of mist curling like smoke from the sea, and an attenuated belt of opaque fog on the northern horizon. The harbour lay open before us, and very commodious and civilised it looked, enclosed between two long piers which ran quite half a mile out from the land to the roadstead (Riff-Gat, by name) where we lay. A stranger might have taken it for a deep and spacious haven; but this, of course, was an illusion, due to the high water. Davies knew that three-quarters of it was mud, the remainder being a dredged-out channel along the western pier. A couple of tugs, a dredger, and a ferry packet with steam up, were moored on that side—a small stack of galliots on the other. Beyond these was another vessel, a galliot in build, but radiant as a queen among sluts; her varnished sides and spars flashing orange in the sun. These and her snow-white sail-covers and the twinkle of brass and gun-metal, proclaimed her to be a yacht. I had already studied her through the glasses and read on her stern *Medusa*. A couple of sailors were swabbing her decks; you could hear the sluish of the water and the scratching of the deck-brooms. "*They* can see us anyway," Davies had said.

For that matter all the world could see us—certainly the incoming steamer must; for we lay as near to the pier as safety permitted, abreast of the berth she would occupy, as we knew by a gangway and a knot of sailors.

A packet boat, not bigger than a big tug, was approaching from the south.

"Remember, we're not supposed to know he's coming," I said; "let's go below." Besides the skylight, our "coach-house" cabin top had little oblong side windows. We wiped clean those on the port side and watched events from them, kneeling on the sofa.

The steamer backed her paddles, flinging out a wash that set us rolling to our scuppers. There seemed to be very few passengers aboard, but all of them were gazing at the *Dulcibella* while the packet was warped alongside. On the forward deck there were some market-women with baskets, a post-

an, and a weedy youth who might be hotel waiter; on the after-deck, anding close together, were two men ulsters and soft felt hats.

"There he is!" said Davies, in a nse whisper; "the tall one." But e tall one turned abruptly as Davies oke and strode away behind the deck-use, leaving me just a lightning im-ession of a grey beard and a steep nned forehead, behind a cloud of gar smoke. It was perverse of me, it, to tell the truth, I hardly missed m, so occupied was I by the short ie, who remained leaning on the rail, oughtfully contemplating the *Dulci-lla* through gold-rimmed pince-nez: sallow, wizened old fellow, beetle-owed, with a bush of grizzled mous-che and a jet-black tuft of beard on s chin. The most remarkable feature as the nose, which was broad and at, merging almost imperceptibly in e wrinkled cheeks. Lightly beaked the nether extremity, it drooped wards an enormous cigar which was ointing at us like a gun just dis-harged. He looked wise as Satan, and ou would say he was smiling inwardly.

"Who's that?" I whispered to avies. (There was no need to talk in hispers, but we did so instinctively.)

"Can't think," said Davies. "Hullo! e's backing off, and they've not nded."

Some parcels and mail-bags had been rown up, and the weedy waiter and vo market-women had gone up the angway, which was now being hauled p, and were standing on the quay. I ink one or two other persons had first ome aboard unnoticed by us, but at ne last moment a man we had not seen efore jumped down to the forward deck.

Grimm!" we both ejaculated at once.

The steamer whistled sharply, circled ackwards into the roadstead, and then teamed away. The pier soon hid her, ut her smoke showed she was steering owards the North Sea.

"What does this mean?" I asked.

"There must be some other quay to top at nearer the town," said Davies. Let's go ashore and get your letters."

We had made a long and painful oilette that morning, and felt quite hy of one another as we sculled towards the pier, in much-creased blue suits, conventional collars, and brown boots. It was the first time for two years that I had seen Davies in anything approaching a respectable garb; but a fashionable watering-place, even in the dead season, exacts respect; and, besides, we had friends to visit.

We tied up the dinghy to an iron ladder, and on the pier found our inquisitor of the night before smoking in the doorway of a shed marked "Harbour Master." After some civilities we inquired about the steamer. The answer was that it was Saturday, and she had, therefore, gone on to Juist. Did we want a good hotel? The "Vier Jahreszeiten" was still open, etc.

"Juist, by Jove!" said Davies, as we walked on. "Why are those three going to Juist?"

"I should have thought it was pretty clear. They're on their way to Memmert."

Davies agreed, and we both looked longingly westward at a straw-coloured streak on the sea.

"Is it some meeting, do you think?" said Davies.

"Looks like it. We shall probably find the *Kormoran* here, wind-bound."

And find her we did soon after, the outermost of the stack of galliots, on the farther side of the harbour. Two men, whose faces we took a good look at, were sitting on her hatch, mending a sail.

Flooded with sun, yet still as the grave, the town was like a dead butterfly for whom the healing rays had come too late. We crossed some deserted public gardens commanded by a gorgeous casino, its porticos heaped with chairs and tables; so past kiosques and *cafés*, great white hotels with boarded windows, bazaars and booths, and all the stale lees of vulgar frivolity, to the post-office, which at least was alive. I received a packet of letters and purchased a local time-table, from which we learnt that the steamer sailed daily to Borkum *via* Norderney, touching three times a week at Juist (weather permitting). On the return journey to-day it was due at Norderney at 7.30 p.m. Then I inquired the way to the "Vier Jahreszeiten." "For whatever your principles, Davies," I said,

"we are going to have the best breakfast money can buy! We've got the whole day before us."

The "Four Seasons" Hotel was on the esplanade facing the northern beach. Living up to its name, it announced on an illuminated signboard, "Inclusive terms for winter visitors; special attention to invalids, etc." Here in a great glass restaurant, with the unruffled blue of ocean spread out before us, we ate the king of breakfasts, dismissed the waiter, and over long and fragrant Havanas examined my mail at leisure.

"What a waste of good diplomacy!" was my first thought; for nothing had been tampered with, so far as we could judge from the minutest scrutiny, directed, of course, in particular to the franked official letters (for to my surprise there were two) from Whitehall.

The first in order of date (Oct. 6th) ran: "Dear Carruthers.—Take another week by all means.—Yours, etc."

The second (marked "urgent") had been sent to my home address and forwarded. It was dated October 15th, and cancelled the previous letter, requesting me to return to London without delay—"I am sorry to abridge your holiday, but we are very busy, and, at present, short-handed.—Yours, etc." There was a dry postscript to the effect that another time I was to be good enough to leave more regular and definite information as to my whereabouts when absent.

"I'm afraid I never got this!" I said, handing it to Davies.

"You won't go, will you?" said he, looking, nevertheless, with unconcealed awe at the great man's handwriting under the haughty official crest. Meanwhile I discovered an endorsement on a corner of the envelope: "Don't worry; it's only the chief's fuss.—M——" I promptly tore up the envelope. There are domestic mysteries which it would be indecent and disloyal to reveal, even to one's best friend. The rest of my letters need no remark; I smiled over some and blushed over others—all were voices from a life which was infinitely far away. Davies, meanwhile, was deep in the foreign intelligence of a newspaper, spelling it out line by line, and referring impatiently to me for the meaning of words.

"Hullo!" he said, suddenly; "same old game! Hear that siren?"

A curtain of fog had grown on the northern horizon and was drawing shorewards slowly but surely.

"It doesn't matter, does it?" I said.

"Well, we must get back to the yacht. We can't leave her alone in a fog."

There was some marketing to be done on the way back, and in the course of looking for the shops we wanted we came on the Schwannallée and noted its position. Before we reached the harbour the fog was on us, charging up the streets in dense masses. Happily a tram-line led right up to the pier-head, or we should have lost our way and wasted time, which, in the event, was of priceless value. Presently we stumbled up against the Harbour Office, which was our landmark for the steps where we had tied up the dinghy. The same official appeared and good-naturedly held the painter while we handed in our parcels. He wanted to know why we had left the flesh-pots of the "Vier Jahreszeiten." To look after our yacht, of course. There was no need, he objected; there would be no traffic moving while the fog lasted, and the fog, having come on at that hour, had come to stay. If it did clear he would keep an eye on the yacht for us. We thanked him, but thought we would go aboard.

"You'll have a job to find her now," he said.

The distance was eighty yards at the most, but we had to use a scientific method, the same one, in fact, that Davies had used last night in the approach to the eastern pier.

"Row straight out at right angles to the pier," he said now. I did so, Davies sounding with his scull between the strokes. He found the bottom after twenty yards, that being the width of the dredged-out channel at this point. Then we turned to the right, and moved gently forward, keeping touch with the edge of the mud-bank (for all the world like blind men tapping along a kerbstone) and taking short excursions from it, till the *Dulcibella* hove in view. "That's partly luck," Davies commented; "we ought to have had a compass as well."

We exchanged shouts with the man on the pier to show we had arrived.

"It's very good practice, that sort of thing," said Davies, when we had disembarked.

"You've got a sixth sense," I observed. "How far could you go like that?"

"Don't know. Let's have another try. I can't sit still all day. Let's explore this channel."

"*Why not go to Memmert?*" I said, in fun.

"To Memmert?" said Davies, slowly; "by Jove! that's an idea!"

"Good Heavens, man! I was joking. Why, it's ten mortal miles."

"More," said Davies, absently. "It's not so much the distance—what's the time? Ten fifteen; quarter ebb—— What am I talking about? We made our plans last night."

But seeing him, to my amazement, serious, I was stung by the splendour of the idea I had awakened. Confidence in his skill was second nature to me. I swept straight on to the logic of the thing, the greatness, the completeness of the opportunity, if by a miracle it could be seized and used. Something was going on at Memmert to-day: our men had gone there; here were we, ten miles away, in a smothering, blinding fog. It was known we were here—Dollmann and Grimm knew it; the crew of the *Medusa* knew it; the crew of the *Kormoran* knew it; the man on the pier, whether he cared or not, knew it. But none of them knew Davies as I knew him. Would anyone dream for an instant——?

"Stop a second," said Davies; "give me two minutes." He whipped out the German chart. "Where exactly should we go?" ("Exactly!" The word tickled me hugely.)

"To the depôt, of course; it's our only chance."

"Listen then—there are two routes: the outside one by the open sea, right round Juist, and doubling south*—the simplest, but the longest; the depôt's at the south point of Memmert, and Memmert's nearly two miles long."

"How far would that way be?"

"Sixteen miles good. And we should have to row in a breaking swell most of the way, close to land."

* See Chart B.

"Out of the question; it's too public, too, if it clears. The steamer went that way, and will come back that way. We must go inside over the sands. Am I dreaming, though? Can you possibly find the way?"

"I shouldn't wonder. But I don't believe you see the hitch. It's the *time* and the falling tide. High water was about 8.15; it's now 10.15, and all those sands are drying off. We must cross the See-Gat and strike that boomed channel, the Memmert Balje; strike it, freeze on to it—can't cut off an inch—and pass that 'watershed' you see there before it's too late. It's an infernally bad one, I can see. Not even a dinghy will cross it for an hour each side of low water."

"Well, how far is the 'watershed'?"

"Good Lord! What are we talking for? Change, man, change! Talk while we're changing." (He began flinging off his shore clothes, and I did the same.) "It's at least five miles to the end of it; six, allowing for bends; hour and a half hard pulling; two, allowing for checks. Are you fit? You'll have to pull the most. Then there are six or seven more miles—easier ones. And then—— What are we to do when we get there?"

"Leave that to me," I said. "You get me there."

"Supposing it clears?"

"After we get there? Bad; but we must risk that. If it clears on the way there it doesn't matter by this route; we shall be miles from land."

"What about getting back?"

"We shall have a rising tide, anyway. If the fog lasts—can you manage in a fog *and* dark?"

"The dark makes it no more difficult, if we've a light to see the compass and chart by. You trim the binnacle lamp—no, the riding-light. Now give me the scissors, and don't speak a word for ten minutes. Meanwhile, think it out, and load the dinghy—(by Jove! though, don't make a sound)—some grub and whisky, the boat-compass, lead, riding-light, matches, *small* boat-hook, grapnel and line."

"Foghorn?"

"Yes, and the whistle too"

"A gun?"

"What for?"

"We're after ducks."

"All right. And muffle the rowlocks with cotton-waste."

I left Davies absorbed in the charts, and softly went about my own functions. In ten minutes he was on the ladder, beckoning.

"I've done," he whispered. "Now *shall* we go?"

"I've thought it out. Yes," I answered.

This was only roughly true, for I could not have stated in words all the pros and cons that I had balanced. It was an impulse that drove me forward; but an impulse founded on reason, with just a tinge, perhaps, of superstition; for the quest had begun in a fog and might fitly end in one.

It was twenty-five minutes to eleven when we noiselessly pushed off. "Let her drift," whispered Davies, "the ebb'll carry her past the pier."

We slid by the *Dulcibella*, and she disappeared. Then we sat without speech or movement for about five minutes, while the gurgle of tide through piles approached and passed. The dinghy appeared to be motionless, just as a balloon in the clouds may appear to its occupants to be motionless, though urged by a current of air. In reality we were driving out of the Riff-Gat into the See-Gat. The dinghy swayed to a light swell.

"Now pull," said Davies, under his breath; "keep it long and steady, above all, steady—both arms with equal force."

I was on the bow-thwart; he *vis-à-vis* to me on the stern seat, his left hand behind him on the tiller, his right forefinger on a small square of paper which lay on his knees; this was a section cut out from the big German chart (Chart B). On the midship-thwart between us lay the compass and a watch. Between these three objects—compass, watch, and chart—his eyes darted constantly, never looking up or out, save occasionally for a sharp glance over the side at the flying bubbles, to see if I was sustaining a regular speed. My duty was to be his automatom, the human equivalent of a marine engine whose revolutions can be counted and used as data by the navigator. My arms must be regular as twin pistons; the energy that drove them as controllable as steam. It was a hard ideal to reach, for the complex mortal tends to rely on all the senses God has given him, so unfitting himself for mechanical exactitude when a sense (eyesight, in my case) fails him. At first it was constantly "left" or "right" from Davies, accompanied by a bubbling from the rudder.

"This won't do, too much helm," said Davies, without looking up. "Keep your stroke, but listen to me. Can you see the compass card?"

"When I come forward."

"Take your time, and don't get flurried, but each time you come forward have a good look at it. The course is sou'-west half-west. You take the opposite, north-east half-east, and keep her *stern* on that. It'll be rough, but it'll save some helm, and give me a hand free if I want it."

I did as he said, not without effort, and our progress gradually became smoother, till he had no need to speak at all. The only sound now was one like the gentle simmer of a saucepan away to port—the lisp of surf I knew it to be—and the muffled grunt of the rowlocks. I broke the silence once to say "It's very shallow." I had touched sand with my right scull.

"Don't talk," said Davies.

About half an hour passed, and then he added sounding to his other occupations. "Plump" went the lead at regular intervals, and he steered with his hip while pulling in the line. Very little of it went out at first, then less still. Again I struck bottom, and, glancing aside, saw weeds. Suddenly he got a deep cast, and the dinghy, freed from the slight drag which shallow water always inflicts on a small boat, leapt buoyantly forward. At the same time, I knew by boils on the smooth surface that we were in a strong tideway.

"The Buse Tief,"* muttered Davies. "Row hard now, and steady as a clock."

For a hundred yards or more I bent to my sculls and made her fly. Davies was getting six fathom casts, till, just as suddenly as it had deepened, the water shoaled—ten feet, six, three, one—the dinghy grounded.

* See Chart B.

"Good!" said Davies. "Back her off! Pull your right only." The dinghy spun round with her bow to N.N.W. "Both arms together! Don't you worry about the compass now; just pull, and listen for orders. There's a tricky bit coming."

He put aside the chart, kicked the lead under the seat, and, kneeling on the dripping coils of line, sounded continuously with the butt-end of the boat-hook, a stumpy little implement, notched at intervals of a foot, and often before used for the same purpose. All at once I was aware that a check had come, for the dinghy swerved and doubled like a hound ranging after scent.

"Stop her," he said, suddenly, "and throw out the grapnel."

I obeyed and we brought up, swinging to a slight current, whose direction Davies verified by the compass. Then for half a minute he gave himself up to concentrated thought. What struck me most about him was that he never for a moment strained his eyes through the fog; a useless exercise (for five yards or so was the radius of our vision) which, however, I could not help indulging in, while I rested. He made up his mind, and we were off again, straight and swift as an arrow this time, and in water deeper than the boathook. I could see by his face that he was taking some bold expedient whose issue hung in the balance. . . . Again we touched mud, and the artist's joy of achievement shone in his eyes. Backing away, we headed west, and for the first time he began to gaze into the fog.

"There's one!" he snapped at last. "Easy all!"

A boom, one of the usual upright saplings, glided out of the mist. He caught hold of it, and we brought up.

"Rest for three minutes now," he said. "We're in fairly good time."

It was 11.10. I ate some biscuits and took a nip of whisky while Davies prepared for the next stage.

We had reached the eastern outlet of Memmert Balje, the channel which runs east and west behind Juist Island, direct to the south point of Memmert. How we had reached it was incomprehensible to me at the time, but the reader will understand by comparing my narrative with the dotted line on the chart. I add this brief explanation, that Davies's method had been to cross the channel called the Buse Tief, and strike the other side of it at a point well *south* of the outlet of the Memmert Balje (in view of the northward set of the ebb-tide), and then to drop back north and feel his way to the outlet. The check was caused by a deep indentation in the Itzendorf Flat; a *cul-de-sac*, with a wide mouth, which Davies was very near mistaking for the Balje itself. We had no time to skirt dents so deep as that; hence the dash across its mouth with the chance of missing the upper lip altogether, and of either being carried out to sea (for the slightest error was cumulative) or straying fruitlessly along the edge.

The next three miles were the most critical of all. They included the "watershed," whose length and depth were doubtful; they included, too, the crux of the whole passage, a spot where the channel forks, our own branch continuing west, and another branch diverging from it north-westward. We must row against time, and yet we must negotiate that crux. Add to this that the current was against us till the watershed was crossed; that the tide was just at its most baffling stage, too low to allow us to risk short cuts, and too high to give definition to the banks of the channel; and that the compass was no aid whatever for the minor bends. "Time's up," said Davies, and on we went. I was hugging the comfortable thought that we should now have booms on our starboard for the whole distance; on our starboard, I say, for experience had taught us that all channels running parallel with the coast and islands were uniformly boomed on the northern side. Anyone less confident than Davies would have succumbed to the temptation of slavishly relying on these marks, creeping from one to the other, and wasting precious time. But Davies knew our friend the "boom" and his eccentricities too well; and preferred to trust to his sense of touch, which no fog in the world could impair. If we happened to sight one, well and good, we should know which side of the channel we were on. But

even this contingent advantage he deliberately sacrificed after a short distance, for he crossed over to the *south* or unboomed side and steered and sounded along it, using the Itzendorf Flat as his handrail, so to speak. He was compelled to do this, he told me afterwards, in view of the crux, where the converging lines of booms would have involved us in irremediable confusion. Our branch was the southern one, and it followed that we must use the southern bank, and defer obtaining any help from booms until sure we were past that critical spot.

For an hour we were at the extreme strain, I of physical exertion, he of mental. I could not get into a steady swing, for little checks were constant. My right scull was for ever skidding on mud or weeds, and the backward suck of shoal water clogged our progress. Once we were both of us out in the slime tugging at the dinghy's sides; then in again, blundering on. I found the fog bemusing, lost all idea of time and space, and felt like a senseless marionette kicking and jerking to a mad music without tune or time. The misty form of Davies as he sat with his right arm swinging rhythmically forward and back, was a clockwork figure as mad as myself, but didactic and gibbering in his madness. Then the boathook he wielded with a circular sweep began to take grotesque shapes in my heated fancy: now it was the antenna of a groping insect, now the crank of a cripple's self-propelled perambulator, now the alpenstock of a lunatic mountaineer, who sits in his chair and climbs and climbs to some phantom "watershed." At the back of such mind as was left me lodged two insistent thoughts: "we must hurry on," "we are going wrong." As to the latter, take a link-boy through a London fog and you will experience the same thing; he always goes the way you think is wrong. "We're rowing *back!*" I remember shouting to Davies once, having become aware that it was now my left scull which splashed against obstructions. "Rubbish," said Davies, "I've crossed over"; and I relapsed.

By degrees I returned to sanity, thanks to improved conditions. It is an ill wind that blows nobody good, and the state of the tide, though it threatened us with total failure, had the compensating advantage that the lower it fell the more constricted and defined became our channel; till the time came when the compass and boathook were alike unnecessary, because our handrail, the muddy brink of the channel, was visible to the eye, close to us; on our right hand always now, for the crux was far behind, and the northern side was now our guide. All that remained was to press on with might and main ere the bed of the creek dried.

What a race it was! Homeric, in effect; a struggle of men with gods, for what were the gods but forces of nature personified? If the God of the Falling Tide did not figure in the Olympian circle he is none the less a mighty divinity. Davies left his post, and rowed stroke. Under our united efforts the dinghy advanced in strenuous leaps, hurling miniature rollers on the bank beside us. My palms, seasoned as they were, were smarting with watery blisters. The pace was too hot for my strength and breath.

"I must have a rest," I gasped.

"Well, I think we're over it," said Davies.

We stopped the dinghy dead, and he stabbed over the side with the boathook. It passed gently astern of us, and even my bewildered brain took in the meaning of that.

"Three feet and the current with us. *Well* over it," he said. "I'll paddle on while you rest and feed."

It was a few minutes past one and we still, as he calculated, had eight miles before us, allowing for bends.

"But it's a mere question of muscle," he said.

I took his word for it, and munched at tongue and biscuits. As for muscle, we were both in hard condition. He was fresh, and what distress I felt was mainly due to spasmodic exertion culminating in that desperate spurt. As for the fog, it had more than once shown a faint tendency to lift, growing thinner and more luminous, in the manner of fogs, always to settle down again, heavy as a quilt.

Note the spot marked "second rest" (approximately correct, Davies says)

and the course of the channel from that point westward. You will see it broadening and deepening to the dimensions of a great river, and finally merging in the estuary of the Ems. Note, too, that its northern boundary, the edge of the now uncovered Nordland Sand, leads, with one interruption (marked A), direct to Memmert, and is boomed throughout. You will then understand why Davies made so light of the rest of his problem. Compared with the feats he had performed, it was child's play, for he always had that visible margin to keep touch with if he chose, or to return to in case of doubt. As a matter of fact—observe our dotted line—he made two daring departures from it, the first purely to save time, the second partly to save time and partly to avoid the very awkward spot marked A, where a creek with booms and a little delta of its own interrupts the even bank. During the first of these departures—the shortest but most brilliant—he let me do the rowing, and devoted himself to the niceties of the course; during the second, and through both the intermediate stages, he rowed himself, with occasional pauses to inspect the chart. We fell into a long, measured stroke, and covered the miles rapidly, scarcely exchanging a single word till, at the end of a long pull through vacancy, Davies said, suddenly:—

"Now where are we to land?"

A sandbank was looming over us crowned by a lonely boom.

"Where are we?"

"A quarter of a mile from Memmert."

"What time is it?"

"Nearly three."

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

THE QUARTETTE

His *tour de force* was achieved, and for the moment something like collapse set in.

"What in the world have we come here for?" he muttered; "I feel a bit giddy."

I made him drink some whisky, which revived him; and then, speaking in whispers, we settled certain points.

I alone was to land. Davies demurred to this out of loyalty, but common sense, coinciding with a strong aversion of his own, settled the matter. Two were more liable to detection than one. I spoke the language well, and if challenged could cover my retreat with a gruff word or two; in my woollen overalls, sea-boots, oilskin coat, with a sou'-wester pulled well over my eyes, I should pass in a fog for a Frisian. Davies must mind the dinghy; but how was I to regain it? I hoped to do so without help, by using the edge of the sand; but if he heard a long whistle he was to blow the foghorn.

"Take the pocket-compass," he said. "Never budge from the shore without using it, and lay it on the ground for steadiness. Take this scrap of chart, too—it may come in useful; but you can't miss the depôt, it looks to be close to the shore. How long will you be?"

"How long have I got?"

"The young flood's making—has been for nearly an hour—that bank (he measured it with his eye) will be covering in an hour and a half."

"That ought to be enough."

"Don't run it too fine. It's steep here, but it may shelve further on. If you have to wade you'll never find me, and you'll make a deuce of a row. Got your watch, matches, knife? No knife? Take mine; never go anywhere without a knife." (It was his seaman's idea of efficiency.)

"Wait a bit, we must settle a place to meet at in case I'm late and can't reach you here."

"*Don't* be late. We've got to get back to the yacht before we're missed."

"But I may have to hide and wait till dark—the fog may clear."

"We were fools to come, I believe," said Davies, gloomily. "There *are* no meeting-places in a place like this. Here's the best I can see on the chart—a big triangular beacon marked on the very point of Memmert. You'll pass it."

"All right. I'm off."

"Good luck," said Davies, faintly.

I stepped out, climbed a miry glacis of five or six feet, reached hard wet sand, and strode away with the sluggish ripple of the Balje on my left hand. A curtain dropped between me and Davies, and I was alone—alone, but how I thrilled to feel the firm sand rustle under my boots; to know that it led to dry land, where, whatever befell, I could give my wits full play. I clove the fog briskly.

Good Heavens! what was that? I stopped short and listened. From over the water on my left there rang out, dulled by fog, but distinct to the ear, three double strokes on a bell or gong. I looked at my watch.

"Ship at anchor," I said to myself. "Six bells in the afternoon watch." I knew the Balje was here a deep roadstead, where a vessel entering the Eastern Ems might very well anchor to ride out a fog.

I was just stepping forward when another sound followed from the same quarter, a bugle-call this time. Then I understood—only men-of-war sound bugles—the *Blitz* was here then; and very natural, too, I thought, and strode on. The sand was growing drier, the water further beneath me; then came a thin black ribbon of weed—high-water mark. A few cautious steps to the right and I touched tufts of marram grass. It was Memmert. I pulled out the chart and refreshed my memory. No! there could be no mistake; keep the sea on my left and I must go right. I followed the ribbon of weed, keeping it just in view, but walking on the verge of the grass for the sake of silence. All at once I almost tripped over a massive iron bar; others, a rusty network of them, grew into being above and around me, like the arms of a ghostly polyp.

"What infernal spider's web is this?" I thought, and stumbled clear. I had strayed into the base of a gigantic tripod, its gaunt legs stayed and cross-stayed, its apex lost in fog; the beacon, I remembered. A hundred yards further and I was down on my knees again, listening with might and main; for several little sounds were in the air—voices, the rasp of a boat's keel, the whistling of a tune. These were straight ahead. More to the left, seaward, that is, I had aural evidence of the presence of a steamboat—a small one, for the hiss of escaping steam was low down. On my right front, I as yet heard nothing, but the depôt must be there.

I prepared to strike away from my base, and laid the compass on the ground—N.W. roughly I made the course. ("South-east—south-east for coming back," I repeated inwardly, like a child learning a lesson.) Then of my two allies I abandoned one, the beach, and threw myself wholly on the fog.

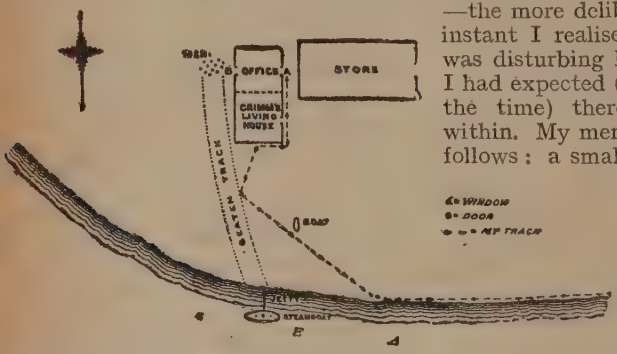
"Play the game," I said to myself. "Nobody expects you; nobody will recognise you."

I advanced in rapid stages of ten yards or so, while grass disappeared and soft sand took its place, pitted everywhere with footmarks. I trod carefully, for obstructions began to show themselves — an anchor, a heap of rusty cable; then a boat bottom upwards, and, lying on it, a foul old meerschaum pipe. I paused here and strained my ears, for there were sounds in many directions; the same whistling (behind me now), heavy footsteps in front, and somewhere beyond—fifty yards away, I reckoned—a buzz of guttural conversation; from the same quarter there drifted to my nostrils the acrid odour of coarse tobacco. Then a door banged.

I put the compass in my pocket (thinking "south-west, south-west"), placed the pipe between my teeth (ugh! the rank savour of it!) rammed my sou'-wester hard down, and slouched on in the direction of the door that had banged. A voice in front called, "Karl Schicker"; a nearer voice, that of the man whose footsteps I had heard approaching, took it up and called "Karl Schicker"; I, too, took it up, and, turning my back, called "Karl Schicker" as gruffly and gutturally as I could. The footsteps passed quite close to me, and glancing over my shoulder I saw a young man passing, dressed very like me, but wearing a sealskin cap instead of a sou'-wester. As he walked he seemed to be counting coins in his palm. A hail came back from the beach and the whistling stopped.

I now became aware that I was on a beaten track. These meetings were

hazardous, so I inclined aside, but not without misgivings, for the path led towards the buzz of talk and the banging door, and these were my only guides to the depôt. Suddenly, and much before I expected it, I knew rather than saw that a wall was in front of me; now it was visible, the side of a low building of corrugated iron. A pause to reconnoitre was absolutely necessary; but the knot of talkers might have heard my footsteps, and I must at all costs not suggest the groping of a stranger. I lit a match—two—and sucked heavily (as I had seen navvies do) at my pipe, studying the trend of the wall by reference to the sounds. There was a stale dottle wedged in the bowl, and loathsome fumes resulted. Just then the same door banged again; another name, which I forget, was called out.



I decided that I was at the end of a rectangular building which I pictured as like an Aldershot "hut," and that the door I heard was round the corner to my *left*. A knot of men must be gathered there, entering it by turns. Having expectorated noisily, I followed the tin wall to my *right*, and turning a corner strolled leisurely on, passing signs of domesticity, a wash-tub, a water-butt, then a tiled approach to an open door. I now was aware of the corner of a second building, also of zinc, parallel to the first, but taller, for I could only just see the eave. I was just going to turn off to this as a more promising field for exploration, when I heard a window open ahead of me in my original building.

I am afraid I am getting obscure, so I append a rough sketch of the scene, as I partly saw and chiefly imagined it. It was window (A) that I heard open. From it I could just distinguish through the fog a hand protrude, and throw something out—a cigar-end? The hand, a clean one with a gold signet-ring, rested for an instant afterwards on the sash, and then closed the window.

My geography was clear now in one respect. That window belonged to the same room as the banging door (B); for I distinctly heard the latter open and shut again, opposite me on the other side of the building. It struck me that it might be interesting to see into that room. "Play the game," I reminded myself, and retreated a few yards back on tiptoe, then turned and sauntered coolly past the window, puffing my villainous pipe and taking a long deliberate look into the interior as I passed—the more deliberate that at the first instant I realised that nobody inside was disturbing himself about me. As I had expected (in view of the fog and the time) there was artificial light within. My mental photograph was as follows: a small room with varnished deal walls and furnished like an office; in the far right-hand corner a counting-house desk, Grimm sitting at it on a high stool, side-face to me, counting money; opposite him in an awkward attitude a burly fellow in seaman's dress holding a diver's helmet. In the middle of the room a deal table, and on it something big and black. Lolling on chairs near it, their backs to me and their faces turned towards the desk and the diver, two men—von Brüning and an older man with a bald yellow head (Dollmann's companion on the steamer, beyond a doubt). On another chair, with its back actually tilted against the window, Dollmann.

Such were the principal features of the scene; for detail I had to make another inspection. Stooping low, I crept back, quiet as a cat, till I was beneath the window, and, as I calculated, directly behind Dollmann's chair. Then with great caution I raised my head. There was only one pair of eyes

in the room that I feared in the least, and that was Grimm's, who sat in profile to me, furthest away. I instantly put Dollmann's back between Grimm and me, and then made my scrutiny. As I made it, I could feel a cold sweat distilling on my forehead and tickling my spine; not from fear or excitement, but from pure ignominy. For beyond all doubt I was present at the meeting of a *bonâ-fide* salvage company. It was pay-day, and the directors appeared to be taking stock of work done; that was all.

Over the door was an old engraving of a two-decker under full sail; pinned on the wall a chart and the plan of a ship. Relics of the wrecked frigate abounded. On a shelf above the stove was a small pyramid of encrusted cannon-balls, and supported on nails at odd places on the walls were corroded old pistols, and what I took to be the remains of a sextant. In a corner of the floor sat a hoary little carronade, carriage and all. None of these things affected me so much as a pile of lumber on the floor, not firewood but unmistakable wreck-wood, black as bog-oak, still caked in places with the mud of ages. Nor was it the mere sight of this lumber that dumbfounded me. It was the fact that a fragment of it, a balk of curved timber garnished with some massive bolts, lay on the table, and was evidently an object of earnest interest. The diver had turned and was arguing with gestures over it; von Brüning and Grimm were pressing another view. The diver shook his head frequently, finally shrugged his shoulders, made a salutation, and left the room. Their movements had kept me ducking my head pretty frequently, but I now grew almost reckless as to whether I was seen or not. All the weaknesses of my theory crowded on me—the arguments Davies had used at Bensersiel; Fräulein Dollmann's thoughtless talk; the ease (comparatively) with which I had reached this spot, not a barrier to cross or a lock to force; the publicity of their passage to Memmert by Dollmann, his friend, and Grimm; and now this glimpse of business-like routine. In a few moments I sank from depth to depth of scepticism. Where were my mines, torpedoes, and submarine boats, and where my imperial conspirators? Was gold after all at the bottom of this sordid mystery? Dollmann after all a commonplace criminal? The ladder of proof I had mounted tottered and shook beneath me. "Don't be a fool," said the faint voice of reason. "There are your four men. Wait."

Two more *employés* came into the room in quick succession and received wages; one looking like a fireman, the other of a superior type, the skipper of a tug, say. There was another discussion with this latter over the balk of wreck-wood, and this man, too, shrugged his shoulders. His departure appeared to end the meeting. Grimm shut up a ledger, and I shrank down on my knees, for a general shifting of chairs began. At the same time, from the other side of the building, I heard my knot of men retreating beachwards, spitting and chatting as they went. Presently someone walked across the room towards my window. I sidled away on all fours, rose and flattened myself erect against the wall, a sickening despondency on me; my intention to slink away south-east as soon as the coast was clear. But the sound that came next pricked me like an electric shock; it was the tinkle and scrape of curtain-rings.

Quick as thought I was back in my old position, to find my view barred by a cretonne curtain. It was in one piece, with no chink for my benefit, but it did not hang straight, bulging towards me under the pressure of something—human shoulders by the shape. Dollmann, I concluded, was still in his old place. I now was exasperated to find that I could scarcely hear a word that was said, not even by pressing my ear against the glass. It was not that the speakers were of set purpose hushing their voices—they used an ordinary tone for intimate discussion—but the glass and curtain deadened the actual words. Still, I was soon able to distinguish general characteristics. Von Brüning's voice—the only one I had ever heard before—I recognised at once; he was on the left of the table, and Dollmann's I knew from his position. The third was a harsh croak, belonging to the old gentleman whom,

for convenience, I shall prematurely begin to call Herr Böhme. It was too old a voice to be Grimm's; besides, it had the ring of authority, and was dealing at the moment in sharp interrogations. Three of its sentences I caught in their entirety. "When was that?" "They went no further?" and "Too long; out of the question." Dollmann's voice, though nearest to me, was the least audible of all. It was a dogged monotone, and what was that odd movement of the curtain at his back? Yes, his hands were behind him clutching and kneading a fold of the cretonne. "You are feeling uncomfortable, my friend," was my comment. Suddenly he threw back his head—I saw the dent of it—and spoke up so that I could not miss a word. "Very well, sir, you shall see them at supper to-night; I will ask them both."

(You will not be surprised to learn that I instantly looked at my watch—though it takes long to write what I have described—but the time was only a quarter to four.) He added something about the fog, and his chair creaked. Ducking promptly I heard the curtain-rings jar, and: "Thick as ever."

"Your report, Herr Dollmann," said Böhme, curtly. Dollmann left the window and moved his chair up to the table; the other two drew in theirs and settled themselves.

"*Chatham*," said Dollmann, as if announcing a heading. It was an easy word to catch, rapped out sharp, and you can imagine how it startled me. "That's where you've been for the last month!" I said to myself. A map crackled and I knew they were bending over it, while Dollmann explained something. But now my exasperation became acute, for not a syllable more reached me. Squatting back on my heels, I cast about for expedients. Should I steal round and try the door? Too dangerous. Climb to the roof and listen down the stove-pipe? Too noisy, and generally hopeless. I tried for a downward purchase on the upper half of the window, which was of the simple sort in two sections, working vertically. No use; it resisted gentle pressure, would start with a sudden jar if I forced it. I pulled out Davies's knife and worked the point of the blade between sash and frame to give it play—no result; but the knife was a nautical one, with a marling-spike as well as a big blade.

Just now the door within opened and shut again, and I heard steps approaching round the corner to my right. I had the presence of mind not to lose a moment, but moved silently away (blessing the deep Frisian sand) round the corner of the big parallel building. Someone whom I could not see walked past till his boots clattered on tiles, next resounded on boards. "Grimm in his living-room," I inferred. The precious minutes ebbed away—five, ten, fifteen. Had he gone for good? I dared not return otherwise. Eighteen—he was coming out! This time I stole forward boldly when the man had just passed, dimly saw a figure, and clearly enough the glint of a white paper he was holding. He made his circuit and re-entered the room.

Here I felt and conquered a relapse to scepticism. "If this is an important conclave why don't they set guards?" Answer, the only possible one, "Because they stand alone. Their *employés*, like *everyone* we had met hitherto, know nothing. The real object of this salvage company (a poor speculation, I opined) is solely to afford a pretext for the conclave." "Why the curtain, even?" "Because there are maps, stupid!"

I was back again at the window, but as impotent as ever against that even stream of low confidential talk. But I would not give up. Fate and the fog had brought me here, the one solitary soul perhaps who by the chain of circumstances had both the will and the opportunity to wrest their secret from these four men.

The marling-spike! Where the lower half of the window met the sill it sank into a shallow groove. I thrust the point of the spike down into the interstice between sash and frame and heaved with a slowly increasing force, which I could regulate to the fraction of an ounce, on this powerful lever. The sash gave, with the faintest possible protest, and by imperceptible degrees I lifted it to the top of the groove, and the least bit above it, say half an inch in all; but it made an appreciable difference to the sounds within, as when you remove your foot from a piano's

soft pedal. I could do no more, for there was no further fulcrum for the spike, and I dared not gamble away what I had won by using my hands.

Hope sank again when I placed my cheek on the damp sill, and my ear to the chink. My men were close round the table referring to papers which I heard rustle. Dollmann's "report" was evidently over, and I rarely heard his voice; Grimm's occasionally, von Brüning's and Böhme's frequently; but, as before, it was the latter only that I could ever count on for an intelligible word. For, unfortunately, the villains of the piece plotted without any regard to dramatic fitness or to my interests. Immersed in a subject with which they were all familiar, they were allusive, elliptic, and persistently technical. Many of the words I did catch were unknown to me. The rest were, for the most part, either letters of the alphabet or statistical figures, of depth, distance, and, once or twice, of time. The letters of the alphabet recurred often, and seemed, as far as I could make out, to represent the key to the cipher. The numbers clustering round them were mostly very small, with decimals. What maddened me most was the scarcity of plain nouns.

To report what I heard to the reader would be impossible; so chaotic was most of it that it left no impression on my own memory. All I can do is to tell him what fragments stuck, and what nebulous classification I involved. The letters ran from A to G, and my best continuous chance came when Böhme, reading rapidly from a paper, I think, went through the letters, backwards, from G, adding remarks to each; thus: "G . . . . . completed." "F . . . . . bad . . . . . 1.3 (metres ?) . . . . . 2.5 (kilometres?)." "E . . . . . thirty-two . . . . . 1.2." "D . . . . . 3 weeks . . . . . thirty." "C . . . . . " and so on.

Another time he went through this list again, only naming each letter himself, and receiving laconic answers from Grimm—answers which seemed to be numbers, but I could not be sure. For minutes together I caught nothing but the scratching of pens and inarticulate mutterings. But out of the muck-heap I picked five pearls—four sibilant nouns and a name that I knew before. The nouns were "Schlepp-boote" (tugs); "Wassertiefe" (depth of water); "Eisenbahn" (railway); "Lotsen" (pilots). The name, also sibilant and thus easiest to hear, was "Esens."

Two or three times I had to stand back and ease my cramped neck, and on each occasion I looked at my watch, for I was listening against time, just as we had rowed against time. We were going to be asked to supper, and must be back aboard the yacht in time to receive the invitation. The fog still brooded heavily and the light, always bad, was growing worse. How would *they* get back? How had they come from Juist? Could we forestall them? Questions of time, tide, distance—just the odious sort of sums I was unfit to cope with—were distracting my attention when it should have been wholly elsewhere. 4.20—4.25—now it was past 4.30, when Davies said the bank would cover. I should have to make for the beacon; but it was fatally near that steamboat path, etc., and I still at intervals heard voices from there. It must have been about 4.35 when there was another shifting of chairs within. Then someone rose, collected papers, and went out; someone else, *without* rising (therefore Grimm), followed him.

There was silence in the room for a minute, and after that, for the first time, I heard some plain colloquial German, with no accompaniment of scratching or rustling. "I must wait for this," I thought, and waited.

"He insists on coming," said Böhme.

"Ach!" (an ejaculation of surprise and protest from von Brüning).

"I said the 25th."

"Why?"

"The tide serves well. The night-train, of course. Tell Grimm to be ready——" (An inaudible question from von Brüning.) "No, any weather." A laugh from von Brüning and some words I could not catch.

"Only one, with half a load."

". . . . . meet?"

"At the station."

"So—how's the fog?"

This appeared to be really the end. Both men rose and steps came towards

the window. I leapt aside as I heard it thrown up, and covered by the noise backed into safety. Von Brüning called "Grimm!" and that, and the open window, decided me that my line of advance was now too dangerous to retreat by. The only alternative was to make a circuit round the bigger of the two buildings—and an interminable circuit it seemed—and all the while I knew my compass-course "south-east" was growing nugatory. I passed a padlocked door, two corners, and faced the void of fog. Out came the compass, and I steadied myself for the sum. "South-east before—I'm further to the eastward now—east will about do"; and off I went, with an error of four whole points, over tussocks and deep sand. The beach seemed much farther off than I had thought, and I began to get alarmed, puzzled over the compass several times, and finally realised that I had lost my way. I had the sense not to make matters worse by trying to find it again, and, as the lesser of two evils, blew my whistle, softly at first, then louder. The bray of a foghorn sounded right *behind* me. I whistled again and then ran for my life, the horn sounding at intervals. In three or four minutes I was on the beach and in the dinghy.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

A CHANGE OF TACTICS

We pushed off without a word, and paddled out of sight of the beach. A voice was approaching, hailing us. "Hail back," whispered Davies; "pretend we're a galliot."

"Ho-a," I shouted, "where am I?"

"Off Memmert," came back. "Where are you bound?"

"Delfzyl," whispered Davies.

"Delf-zyl," I bawled.

A sentence ending with "anchor" was returned.

"The flood's tearing east," whispered Davies; "sit still."

We heard no more, and, after a few minutes' drifting, "What luck?" said Davies.

"One or two clues, and an invitation to supper."

The clues I left till later; the invitation was the thing, and I explained its urgency.

"How will *they* get back?" said Davies; "if the fog lasts the steamer's sure to be late."

"We can count on nothing," I answered. "There was some little steamboat off the depôt, and the fog may lift. Which is our quickest way?"

"At this tide, a bee-line to Norderney by compass; we shall have water over all the banks."

He had all his preparations made, the lamp lit in advance, the compass in position, and we started at once; he at the bow-oar, where he had better control over the boat's nose; lamp and compass on the floor between us. Twilight thickened into darkness—a choking, pasty darkness—and still we sped unfalteringly over that trackless waste, sitting and swinging in our little pool of stifled orange light. To drown fatigue and suspense I conned over my clues, and tried to carve into my memory every fugitive word I had overheard.

"What are there seven of round here?" I called back to Davies once (thinking of A to G). "Sorry," I added, for no answer came.

"I see a star," was my next word, after a long interval. "Now it's gone. There it is again! Right aft!"

"That's Borkum light," said Davies, presently; "the fog's lifting."

A keen wind from the west struck our faces, and as swiftly as it had come the fog rolled away from us, in one mighty mass, stripping clean and pure the starry dome of heaven, still bright with the western after-glow, and beginning to redden in the east to the rising moon. Norderney light was flashing ahead, and Davies could take his tired eyes from the pool of light.

"Damn!" was all he uttered in the way of gratitude for this mercy, and I felt very much the same; for in a fog Davies in a dinghy was a match for a steamer; in a clear he lost his handicap.

It was a quarter to seven. "An hour'll do it, if we buck up," he pronounced, after taking a rough bearing with the two lights. He pointed out a star to me, which we were to keep exactly astern, and again I applied to their labour my aching back and smarting palms.

"What did you say about seven of something?" said Davies.

"What are there seven of hereabouts?"

"Islands, of course," said Davies. "Is that the clue?"

"Maybe."

Then followed the most singular of all our confabulations. Two memories are better than one, and the sooner I carved the cipher into his memory as well as mine the better record we should have. So, with rigid economy of breath, I snapped out all my story, and answered his breathless questions. It saved me from being mesmerised by the star, and both of us from the consciousness of over-fatigue.

"Spying at Chatham, the blackguard?" he hissed.

"What do you make of it?" I asked.

"Nothing about battleships, mines, forts?" he said.

"No."

"Nothing about the Ems, Emden, Wilhelmshaven?"

"No."

"Nothing about transports?"

"No."

"I believe—I was right—after all—something to do—with the channels—behind islands."

And so that outworn creed took a new lease of life; though for my part the words that clashed with it were those that had sunk the deepest.

"Esens," I protested; "that town behind Bensersiel."

"Wassertiefe, Lotsen, Schleppboote," spluttered Davies.

"Kilometre—Eisenbahn," from me, and so on.

I should earn the just execration of the reader if I continued to report such a dialogue. Suffice to say that we realised very soon that the substance of the plot was still a riddle. On the other hand, there was fresh scent, abundance of it; and the question was already taking shape—were we to follow it up or revert to last night's decision and strike with what weapons we had? It was a pressing question, too, the last of many—was there to be no end to the emergencies of this crowded day?—pressing for reasons I could not define, while convinced that we must be ready with an answer by supper-time to-night.

Meantime, we were nearing Norderney; the See-Gat was crossed, and with the last of the flood tide fair beneath us, and the red light on the west pier burning ahead, we began insensibly to relax our efforts. But I dared not rest, for I was at that point of exhaustion when mechanical movement was my only hope.

"Light astern," I said, thickly. "Two—white and red."

"Steamer," said Davies; "going south though."

"Three now."

A neat triangle of gems—topaz, ruby, and emerald—hung steady behind us.

"Turned east," said Davies. "Buck up—steamer from Juist. No, by Jove! too small. What is it?"

On we laboured, while the gems waxed in brilliancy as the steamer overhauled us.

"Easy," said Davies, "I seem to know those lights—the *Blitz's* launch—don't let's be caught rowing like madmen in a muck sweat. Paddle in shore a bit." He was right, and, as in a dream, I saw hurrying and palpitating up the same little pinnace that had towed us out of Bensersiel.

"We're done for now," I remember thinking, for the guilt of the runaway was strong in me; and an old remark of von Brüning's about "police" was in my ears. But she was level with and past us before I could sink far into despair.

"Three of them behind the hood," said Davies; "what are we to do?"

"Follow," I answered, and essayed a feeble stroke, but the blade scuttered over the surface.

"Let's wait about for a bit," said Davies. "We're late anyhow. If they go to the yacht they'll think we're ashore."

"Our shore clothes—lying about."

"Are you up to talking?"

"No; but we must. The least suspicion'll do for us now."

"Give me your sculls, old chap, and put on your coat."

He extinguished the lantern, lit a pipe, and then rowed slowly on, while I sat on a slack heap in the stern and devoted my last resources of will to the emancipation of the spirit from the tired flesh.

In ten minutes or so we were rounding the pier, and there was the yacht's top-mast against the sky. I saw, too, that the launch was alongside of her, and told Davies so. Then I lit a cigarette, and made a lamentable effort to whistle. Davies followed suit, and emitted a strange melody which I took to be "Home, Sweet Home," but he has not the slightest ear for music.

"Why, they're on board, I believe," said I; "the cabin's lighted. Ahoy there!" I shouted as we came up. "Who's that?"

"Good evening, sir," said a sailor, who was fending off the yacht with a boathook. "It's Commander von Brüning's launch. I think the gentlemen want to see you."

Before we could answer, an exclamation of: "Why, here they are!" came from the deck of the *Dulcibella*, and the dim form of von Brüning himself emerged from the companion-way. There was something of a scuffle down below, which the commander nearly succeeded in drowning by the breeziness of his greeting. Meanwhile, the ladder creaked under fresh weight, and Dollmann appeared.

"Is that you, Herr Davies?" he said.

"Hullo! Herr Dollmann," said Davies; "how are you?"

I must explain that we had floated up between the yacht and the launch, whose sailors had passed her a little aside in order to give us room. Her starboard side-light was just behind and above us, pouring its green rays obliquely over the deck of the *Dulcibella*, while we and the dinghy were in deep shadow between. The most studied calculation could not have secured us more favourable conditions for a moment which I had always dreaded—the meeting of Davies and Dollmann. The former, having shortened his sculls, just sat where he was, half turned towards the yacht and looking up at his enemy. No lineament of his own face could have been visible to the latter, while those pitiless green rays—you know their ravaging effect on the human physiognomy—struck full on Dollmann's face. It was my first fair view of it at close quarters, and, secure in my background of gloom, I feasted with a luxury of superstitious abhorrence on the livid smiling mask that for a few moments stooped peering down towards Davies. One of the caprices of the crude light was to obliterate, or at any rate so penetrate, beard and moustache, as to reveal in outline lips and chin, the features in which defects of character are most surely betrayed, especially when your victim smiles. Accuse me, if you will, of stooping to melodramatic embroidery; object that my own prejudiced fancy contributed to the result; but I can, nevertheless, never efface the impression of malignant perfidy and base passion, exaggerated to caricature, that I received in those few instants. Another caprice of the light was to identify the man with the portrait of him, when younger and clean-shaven, in the frontispiece of his own book; and another still, the most repulsively whimsical of all, was to call forth a strong resemblance to the sweet young girl who had been with us yesterday.

Enough! I shall never offend again in this way. In reality I am much more inclined to laugh than shudder over this meeting; for meanwhile the third of our self-invited guests had with stertorous puffing risen to the stage, for all the world like a demon out of a trap-door, specially when he entered the zone of that unearthly light. And there they stood in a row, like delinquents at judgment, while we, the true culprits, had only passively to accept explanations. Of course these were plausible enough. Dollmann having seen the yacht in port that morning had called on his return from Memmert to ask us to supper. Finding no one aboard, and concluding we were ashore, he had meant to leave a note for Davies in the cabin. His friend, Herr Böhme, "*the distinguished engineer*," was anxious to see over the little vessel that had come so far, and he knew that Davies would not mind the intrusion. Not at all, said Davies; would not they

stop and have drinks? No, but would we come to supper at Dollmann's villa? With pleasure, said Davies, but we had to change first. Up to this point we had been masters of the situation; but here von Brüning, who alone of the three appeared to be entirely at his ease, made the *retour offensif*.

"Where have you been?" he asked.

"Oh, rowing about since the fog cleared," said Davies.

I suppose he thought that evasion would pass muster, but as he spoke, I noticed to my horror that a stray beam of light was playing on the bunch of white cotton-waste that adorned one of the rowlocks; for we had forgotten to remove these tell-tale appendages. So I added: "After ducks again"; and, lifting one of the guns let the light flash on its barrel. To my own ears my voice sounded husky and distant.

"Always ducks," laughed von Brüning. "No luck, I suppose?"

"No," said Davies; "but it ought to be a good time after sunset——"

"What, with a rising tide and the banks covered?"

"We saw some," said Davies, sullenly.

"I tell you what, my zealous young sportsmen, you're rash to leave your boat at anchor here after dark without a light. I came aboard to find your lamp and set it."

"Oh, thanks," said Davies; "we took it with us."

"To see to shoot by?"

We laughed uncomfortably, and Davies compassed a wonderful German phrase to the effect that "it might come in useful." Happily the matter went no further, for the position was a strained one at the best, and would not bear lengthening. The launch went alongside, and the invaders evacuated British soil, looking, for all von Brüning's flippant nonchalance, a rather crest-fallen party. So much so, that, acute as was my anxiety, I took courage to whisper to Davies, while the transhipment of Herr Böhme was proceeding: "Ask Dollmann to stay while we dress."

"Why?" he whispered.

"Go on."

"I say, Herr Dollmann," said Davies, "won't you stay on board with us while we dress? There's a lot to tell you, and—and we can follow on with you when we're ready."

Dollmann had not yet stepped into the launch. "With pleasure," he said; but there followed an ominous silence, broken by von Brüning.

"Oh, come along, Dollmann, and let them alone," he said, brusquely. "You'll be horribly in the way down there, and we shall never get any supper if you keep them yarning."

"And it's now a quarter-past eight o'clock," grumbled Herr Böhme from his corner behind the hood. Dollmann submitted, and excused himself, and the launch steamed away.

"I think I twig," said Davies, as he helped, almost hoisted, me aboard. "Rather risky though—eh?"

"I knew they'd object—only wanted to make sure."

The cabin was just as we had left it, our shore clothes lying in disorder on the bunks, a locker or two half open.

"Well, I wonder what they did down here," said Davies.

For my part I went straight to the bookshelf.

"Does anything strike you about this?" I asked, kneeling on the sofa.

"Logbook's shifted," said Davies. "I'll swear it was at the end before."

"That doesn't matter. Anything else?"

"By Jove!—where's Dollmann's book?"

"It's here all right, but not where it should be." I had been reading it, you remember, overnight, and in the morning had replaced it in full view among the other books. I now found it behind them, in a wrenched attitude, which showed that someone who had no time to spare had pushed it roughly inwards.

"What do you make of that?" said Davies.

He produced long drinks, and we allowed ourselves ten minutes of absolute rest, stretched at full length on the sofas.

"They don't trust Dollmann," I said. "I spotted that at Memmert even."

"How?"

"First, when they were talking about you and me. He was on his defence, and in a deuce of a funk, too. Böhme was pressing him hard. Again, at the end, when he left the room followed by

Grimm, who I'm certain was sent to watch him. It was while he was away that the other two arranged that rendezvous for the night of the 25th. And again just now, when you asked him to stay. I believe it's working out as I thought it would. Von Brüning, and through him Böhme (who is the "engineer from Bremen") know the story of that short cut and suspect that it was an attempt on your life. Dollmann daren't confess to that, because, morality apart, it could only have been prompted by extreme necessity—that is, by the knowledge that you were really dangerous, and not merely an inquisitive stranger. Now *we* know his motive; but they don't yet. The position of that book proves it."

"He shoved it in?"

"To prevent them seeing it. There's no earthly reason why *they* should have hidden it."

"Then we're getting on," said Davies. "That shows they know his real name, or why should he shove the book in? But they don't know he wrote a book, and that I have a copy."

"At any rate he *thinks* they don't; we can't say more than that."

"And what does he think about me—and you?"

"That's the point. Ten to one he's in tortures of doubt, and would give a fortune to have five minutes' talk alone with you to see how the land lies and get your version of the short cut incident. But they won't let him. They want to watch him in our company and us in his; you see it's an interesting reunion for you and him."

"Well, let's get into these beastly clothes for it," groaned Davies. "I shall have a plunge overboard."

Something drastic was required, and I followed his example, curious as the hour was for bathing.

"I believe I know what happened just now," said I, as we plied rough towels in the warmth below. "They steamed up and found nobody on board. 'I'll leave a note,' says Dollmann. 'No independent communications,' say they (or think they), 'we'll come too, and take the chance of inspecting this hornets' nest.' Down they go, and Dollmann, who knows what to look for first, sees that damning bit of evidence staring him in the face. They look casually at the shelf among other things—examine the logbook, say—and he manages to push his own book out of sight. But he couldn't replace it when the interruption came. The action would have attracted attention *then*, and Böhme made him leave the cabin in advance, you know."

"This is all very well," said Davies, pausing in his toilet, "but do they guess how we've spent the day? By Jove, Carruthers, that chart with the square cut out; there it is on the rack!"

"We must chance it, and bluff for all we're worth," I said. The fact was that Davies could not be brought to realise that he had done anything very remarkable that day; yet those fourteen sinuous miles traversed blindfold, to say nothing of the return journey and my own exploits, made up an achievement audacious and improbable enough to out-distance suspicion. Nevertheless, von Brüning's banter had been disquieting, and if an inkling of our expedition had crossed his mind or theirs, there were ways of testing us which it would require all our effrontery to defeat.

"What are you looking for?" said Davies. I was at the collar and stud stage, but had broken off to study the time-table which we had bought that morning.

"Somebody insists on coming by the night train to somewhere, on the 25th," I reminded him. "Böhme, von Brüning, and Grimm are to meet the Somebody."

"Where?"

"At a railway station; I don't know where. They seemed to take it for granted. But it must be somewhere on the sea, because Böhme said, 'the tide serves.'"

"It may be anywhere from Emden to Hamburg." *

"No, there's a limit; it's probably somewhere near. Grimm was to come, and he's at Memmert."

"Here's the map. . . . Emden and Norddeich are the only coast stations till you get to Wilhelmshaven—no, to Carolinensiel; but those are a long way east."

"And Emden's a long way south.

* See Map B.

Say Norddeich then; but according to this there's no train there after 6.15 p.m.; that's hardly 'night.' When's high tide on the 25th?"

"Let's see—8.30 here to-night—Norddeich'll be the same. Somewhere between 10.30 and 11 on the 25th."

"There's a train at Emden at 9.22 from Leer and the south, and one at 10.50 from the north."

"Are you counting on another fog?" said Davies, mockingly.

"No; but I want to know what our plans are."

"Can't we wait till this cursed inspection's over?"

"No, we can't; we should come to grief." This was no barren truism, for I was ready with a plan of my own, though reluctant to broach it to Davies.

Meanwhile, ready or not, we had to start. The cabin we left as it was, changing nothing and hiding nothing; the safest course to take, we thought, in spite of the risk of further search. But, as usual, I transferred my diary to my breast-pocket, and made sure that the two official letters from England were safe in a compartment of it.

"What do you propose?" I asked, when we were in the dinghy again.

"It's a case of 'as you were,'" said Davies. "To-day's trip was a chance we shall never get again. We must go back to last night's decision—tell them that we're going to stay on here for a bit. Shooting, I suppose we shall have to say."

"And courting?" I suggested.

"Well, they know all about that. And then we must watch for a chance of tackling Dollmann privately. Not to-night, because we want time to consider those clues of yours."

"'Consider'?" I said; "that's putting it mildly."

We were at the ladder, and what a languid stiffness oppressed me I did not know till I touched its freezing rungs, each one of which seared my sore palms like red-hot iron.

The overdue steamer was just arriving as we set foot on the quay.

"And yet, by Jove! why not to-night?" pursued Davies, beginning to stride up the pier at a pace I could not imitate.

"Steady on," I protested; "and, look here, I disagree altogether. I believe to-day has doubled our chances, but unless we alter our tactics it has doubled our risks. We've involved ourselves in too tangled a web. I don't like this inspection, and I fear that foxy old Böhme who prompted it. The mere fact of their inviting us shows that we stand badly; for it runs in the teeth of Brüning's warning at Bensersiel, and smells uncommonly like arrest. There's a rift between Dollman and the others, but it's a ticklish matter to drive our wedge in; as to *to-night*, hopeless; they're on the watch, and won't give us a chance. And after all, do we know enough? We don't know why he fled from England and turned German. It may have been an extraditable crime, but it may not. Supposing he defies us? There's the girl, you see—she ties our hands, and if he once gets wind of that, and trades on our weakness, the game's up."

"What are you driving at?"

"We want to detach him from Germany, but he'll probably go to any lengths rather than abandon his position here. His attempt on you is the measure of his interest in it. Now, is to-day to be wasted?" We were passing through the public gardens, and I dropped on to a seat for a moment's rest, crackling dead leaves under me. Davies remained standing, and pecked at the gravel with his toe.

"We have got two valuable clues," I went on; "that rendezvous on the 25th is one, and the name Esens is the other. We may consider them to eternity; I vote we act on them."

"How?" said Davies. "We're under a search-light here; and if we're caught——"

"Your plan—ugh!—it's as risky as mine, and more so," I replied, rising with a jerk, for a spasm of cramp took me. "We must separate," I added, as we walked on. "We want, at one stroke, to prove to them that we're harmless, and to get a fresh start. I go back to London."

"To London!" said Davies. We were passing under an arc lamp, and, for the dismay his face showed I might have said Kamschatka,—

"Well, after all, it's where I ought to be at this moment," I observed.

"Yes, I forgot. And me?"

"You can't get on without me, so you lay up the yacht here—taking your time."

"While you?"

"After making inquiries about Dollmann's past I double back as somebody else, and follow up the clues."

"You'll have to be quick," said Davies, abstractedly.

"I can just do it in time for the 25th."

"When you say 'making inquiries,'" he continued, looking straight before him, "I hope you don't mean setting other people on his track?"

"He's fair game!" I could not help saying; for there were moments when I chafed under this scrupulous fidelity to our self-denying ordinance.

"He's our game, or nobody's," said Davies, sharply.

"Oh, I'll keep the secret," I rejoined.

"Let's stick together," he broke out. "I shall make a muck of it without you. And how are we to communicate—meet?"

"Somehow—that can wait. I know it's a leap in the dark, but there's safety in darkness."

"Carruthers! what are we talking about? If they have the ghost of a notion where we have been to-day, you give us away by packing off to London. They'll think we know their secret and are clearing out to make use of it. *That* means arrest, if you like!"

"Pessimist! Haven't I written proof of good faith in my pocket—official letters of recall, received to-day? It's one deception the less, you see; for those letters *may* have been opened; skilfully done it's impossible to detect. When in doubt, tell the truth!"

"It's a rum thing how often it pays in this spying business," said Davies, thoughtfully.

We had been tramping through deserted streets under the glare of electricity, I with my leaden shuffle, he with the purposeful forward stoop and swinging arms that always marked his gait ashore.

"Well, what's it to be?" I said. "Here's the Schwannallée."

"I don't like it," said he; "but I trust your judgment."

We turned slowly down, running over a few last points where prior agreement was essential. As we stood at the very gate of the villa: "Don't commit yourself to dates," I said; "say nothing that will prevent you from being here at least a week hence with the yacht still afloat." And my final word, as we waited at the door for the bell to be answered, was: "Don't mind what *I* say. If things look queer we may have to lighten the ship."

"Lighten?" whispered Davies; "oh, I hope I shan't bosh it."

"I hope I shan't get cramp," I muttered between my teeth.

It will be remembered that Davies had never been to the villa before.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

FINESSE

The door of a room on the ground floor was opened to us by a man-servant. As we entered the rattle of a piano stopped, and a hot wave of mingled scent and cigar smoke struck my nostrils. The first thing I noticed over Davies's shoulder, as he preceded me into the room, was a woman—the source of the perfume I decided—turning round from the piano as he passed it and staring him up and down with a disdainful familiarity that I at once hotly resented. She was in evening dress, pronounced in cut and colour; had a certain exuberant beauty, not wholly ascribable to nature, and a notable lack of breeding. Another glance showed me Dollmann putting down a liqueur glass of brandy, and rising from a low chair with something of a start; and another, von Brüning, lying back in a corner of a sofa, smoking; on the same sofa, *vis-à-vis* to him, was—yes, of course it was—Clara Dollmann; but how their surroundings alter people, I caught myself thinking. For the rest,

I was aware that the room was furnished with ostentation, and was stuffy with stove-engendered warmth. Davies steered a straight course for Dollmann, and shook his hand with businesslike resolution. Then he tacked across to the sofa, abandoning me in the face of the enemy.

"Mr. —— ?" said Dollmann.

"Carruthers," I answered, distinctly. "I was with Davies in the boat just now, but I don't think he introduced me. And now he has forgotten again," I added, dryly, turning towards Davies, who, having presented himself to Fräulein Dollmann, was looking feebly from her to von Brüning, the picture of tongue-tied awkwardness. (The commander nodded to me and stretched himself with a yawn.)

"Von Brüning told me about you," said Dollmann, ignoring my allusion, "but I was not quite sure of the name. No; it was not an occasion for formalities, was it?" He gave a sudden, mirthless laugh. I thought him flushed and excitable; yet, seen in a normal light, he was in some respects a pleasant surprise, the remarkable conformation of the head giving an impression of intellectual power and restless, almost insanely restless, energy.

"What need?" I said. "I have heard so much about you from Davies—and Commander von Brüning—that we seem to be old friends already."

He shot a doubtful look at me, and a diversion came from the piano.

"And now, for Heaven's sake," cried the lady of the perfume, "let us join Herr Böhme at supper!"

"Let me present you to my wife," said Dollmann.

So this was the stepmother; unmistakably German, I may add. I made my bow, and underwent much the same sort of frank scrutiny as Davies, only that it was rather more favourable to me, and ended in a carmine smile.

There was a general movement, and further introductions. Davies was led to the stepmother, and I found myself confronting the daughter with quickened pulses, and a sudden sense of added complexity in the issues. I had, of course, made up my mind to ignore our meeting of yesterday, and had assumed that she would do the same. And she did ignore it—we met as utter strangers; nor did I venture (for other eyes were upon us) to transmit any sign of intelligence to her. But the next moment I was wondering if I had not fallen into a trap. She had promised not to tell, but under what circumstances? I saw the scene again; the misty flats, the spruce little sailboat and its sweet young mistress, fresh as a dewy flower, but blanched and demoralised by a horrid fear, appealing to my honour to so act that we three should never meet again, promising to be silent, but as much in her own interest as ours, and under that implied condition which I had only equivocally refused. The condition was violated, not by her fault or ours, but violated. She was free to help her father against us, and was she helping him? What troubled me was the change in her; that she—how can I express it without offence?—was less in discord with her surroundings than she should have been; that in dress, pose, and manner (as we exchanged some trivialities) she was too near reflecting the style of the other woman; that, in fact, she in some sort realised my original conception of her, so brutally avowed to Davies, so signally, as I had thought, falsified. In the sick perplexity that this discovery caused me I dare say I looked as foolish as Davies had done, and more so, for the close heat of the room and its tainted atmosphere, succeeding so abruptly to the wholesome nip of the outside air, were giving me a faintness which this moral check lessened my power to combat. Von Brüning's face wore a sneering smile that I winced under; and, turning, I found another pair of eyes fixed on me, those of Herr Böhme, whose squat figure had appeared at a pair of folding doors leading to an adjoining room. Napkin in hand he was taking in the scene before him with fat benevolence, but exceeding shrewdness. I instantly noticed a faint red weal relieving the ivory of his bald head; and I had suffered too often in the same quarter myself to mistake its origin, namely, our cabin doorway.

"This is the other young explorer,

Böhme," said von Brüning. "Herr Davies kidnapped him a month ago, and bullied and starved him into submission; they'll drown together yet. I believe his sufferings have been terrible."

"His sufferings are over," I retorted. "I've mutinied—deserted—haven't I, Davies?" I caught Davies gazing with solemn *gaucherie* at Miss Dollmann.

"Oh, what?" he stammered. I explained in English. "Oh, yes, Carruthers has to go home," he said, in his vile lingo.

No one spoke for a moment, and even von Brüning had no persiflage ready.

"Well, are we never going to have supper?" said madame, impatiently; and with that we all moved towards the folding doors. There had been little formality in the proceedings so far, and there was less still in the supper-room. Böhme resumed his repast with appetite, and the rest of us sat down apparently at random, though an underlying method was discernible. As it worked out, Dollmann was at one end of the small table, with Davies on his right and Böhme on his left; Frau Dollmann at the other, with me on her right and von Brüning on her left. The seventh personage, Fräulein Dollmann, was between the commander and Davies on the side opposite to me. No servants appeared, and we waited on ourselves. I have a vague recollection of various excellent dishes, and a distinct one of abundance of wine. Someone filled me a glass of champagne, and I confess that I drained it with honest avidity, blessing the craftsman who coaxed forth the essence, the fruit that harboured it, the sun that warmed it.

"Why are you going so suddenly?" said von Brüning to me across the table.

"Didn't I tell you we had to call here for letters? I got mine this morning, and among others a summons back to work. Of course I must obey." (I found myself speaking in a frigid silence.) "The annoying thing was that there were two letters, and if I had only come here two days sooner I should have only got the first, which gave me an extension."

"You are very conscientious. How will they know?"

"Ah, but the second's rather urgent."

There was another uncomfortable silence, broken by Dollmann.

"By the way, Herr Davies," he began, "I ought to apologise to you for——"

This was no business of mine, and the less interest I took in it the better; so I turned to Frau Dollmann and abused the fog.

"Have you been in the harbour all day?" she asked; "then how was it you did not visit us? Was Herr Davies so shy?" (Curiosity or malice?)

"Quite the contrary; but I was," I answered, coldly; "you see, we knew Herr Dollmann was away, and we really only called here to get my letters; besides, we did not know your address." I looked at Clara and found her talking gaily to von Brüning, deaf seemingly to our little dialogue.

"Anyone would have told you it," said madame, raising her eyebrows.

"I dare say; but directly after breakfast the fog came on, and—well, one cannot leave a yacht alone in a fog," I said, with professional solidity.

Von Brüning pricked up his ears at this. "I'll be hanged if that was *your* maxim," he laughed; "you're too fond of the shore!"

I sent him a glance of protest, as though to say: "What's the use of your warning if you won't let me act on it?"

For, of course, my excuses were meant chiefly for his consumption and Fräulein Dollmann's. That the lady I addressed them to found them unpalatable was not my fault.

"Then you sat in your wretched little cabin all day?" she persisted.

"All day," I said, brazenly; "it was the safest thing to do." And I looked again at Fräulein Dollmann, frankly and squarely. Our eyes met, and she dropped hers instantly, but not before I had learnt something; for if ever I saw misery under a mask it was on her face. No; she had not told.

I think I puzzled the stepmother, who shrugged her white shoulders, and said in that case she wondered we had dared to leave our precious boat and come to supper. If we knew Frisian fogs as well as she did——

Oh, I explained, we were not so

nervous as that; and as for supper on shore, if she only knew what a Spartan life we led——

"Oh, for mercy's sake, don't tell me about it!" she cried, with a grimace; "I hate the mention of yachts. When I think of that dreadful *Medusa* coming from Hamburg——" I sympathised with half my attention, keeping one strained ear open for developments on my right. Davies, I knew, was in the thick of it, and none too happy under Böhme's eye, but working manfully. "My fault" — "sudden squall" — "quite safe," were some of the phrases I caught; while I was aware, to my alarm, that he was actually drawing a diagram of something with bread-crumbs and table knives. The subject seemed to gutter out to an awkward end, and suddenly Böhme, who was my right-hand neighbour, turned to me. "You are starting for England to-morrow morning?" he said.

"Yes," I answered; "there is a steamer at 8.15, I believe."

"That is good. We shall be companions."

"Are you going to England, too, sir?" I asked, with hot misgivings.

"No, no! I am going to Bremen; but we shall travel together as far as —you go by Amsterdam, I suppose? —as far as Leer, then. That will be very pleasant." I fancied there was a ghoulish gusto in his tone.

"Very," I assented. "You are making a short stay here, then?"

"As long as usual. I visit the work at Memmert once a month or so, spend a night with my friend Dollmann and his charming family" (he leered round him), "and return."

Whether I was right or wrong in my next step I shall never know, but obeying a strong instinct, "Memmert," I said; "do tell me more about Memmert. We heard a good deal about it from Commander von Brüning; but——"

"He was discreet, I expect," said Böhme.

"He left off at the most interesting part."

"What's that about me?" joined in von Brüning.

"I was saying that we're dying to know more about Memmert, aren't we, Davies?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Davies, evidently aghast at my temerity; but I did not mind that. If he roughed my suit, so much the better; I intended to rough his.

"You gave us plenty of history, commander, but you did not bring up to date." The triple alliance laughed, Dollmann boisterously.

"Well," said von Brüning; "I gave you very good reasons, and you acquiesced."

"And now he is trying to pump *me*," said Böhme, with his rasping chuckle.

"Wait a bit, sir; I have an excuse. The commander was not only mysterious but inaccurate. I appeal to you, Herr Dollmann, for it was *apropos* of you. When we fell in with him at Bensersiel, Davies asked him if you were at home, and he said 'No.' When would you be back? Probably soon; *but he did not know when.*"

"Oh, he said that?" said Dollmann.

"Well, only three days later we arrive at Norderney, and find you have returned that very day, but have gone to Memmert. Again (by the way) the mysterious Memmert! But more than ever mysterious now, for in the evening, not only you and Herr Böhme——"

"What penetration!" laughed von Brüning.

"But also Commander von Brüning, pay us a visit in *his* launch, all coming from Memmert!"

"And you infer?" said von Brüning.

"Why, that you must have known at Bensersiel—only three days ago—exactly when Herr Dollmann was coming back, having an appointment at Memmert with him for to-day."

"Which I wished to conceal from you?"

"Yes, and that's why I'm so inquisitive; it's entirely your own fault."

"So it seems," said he, with mock humility; "but fill your glass and go on, young man. Why should I want to deceive you?"

"That's just what I want to know. Come, confess now; wasn't there something important afoot to-day at Memmert? Something to do with the gold? You were inspecting it, sorting it

weighing it? Or *I* know! You were transporting it secretly to the mainland?"

"Not a very good day for that! But, softly, Herr Carruthers; no fishing for admissions. Who said we had found any gold?"

"Well, have you? There!"

"That's better! Nothing like candour, my young investigator. But I am afraid, having no authority, I cannot assist you at all. Better try Herr Böhme again. I'm only a casual onlooker."

"With shares."

"Ah! you remember that? (He remembers everything!) With a few shares, then; but with no expert knowledge. Now Böhme is the consulting engineer. Rescue me, Böhme!"

"I cannot disclaim expert knowledge," said Böhme, with humorous gravity; "but I disclaim responsibility. Now, Herr Dollmann is chairman of the company."

"And I," said Dollmann, with a noisy laugh, "must fall back on the shareholders, whose interests I have to guard. One can't be too careful in these confidential matters."

"Here's one who gives his consent," I said. "Can't he represent the rest?"

"Extorted by torture," said von Brüning. "I retract."

"Don't mind them, Herr Carruthers," cried Frau Dollmann, "they are making fun of you; but I will give you a hint; no woman can keep a secret——"

"Ah!" I cried, triumphantly, "you have been there?"

"I? Not I; I detest the sea! But Clara has." Everyone looked at Clara, who in her turn looked in naïve bewilderment from me to her father.

"Indeed?" I said, more soberly, "but perhaps she is not a free agent."

"Perfectly free!" said Dollmann.

"I have only been there once, some time ago," said she, "and I saw no gold at all."

"Guarded," I observed. "I beg your pardon; I mean that perhaps you only saw what you were allowed to see. And, in any case, the fräulein has no expert knowledge and no responsibility, and, perhaps, no shares. Her province is to be charming, not to hold financial secrets."

"I have done my best to help you," said the stepmother.

"They're all against us, Davies."

"Oh, chuck it, Carruthers!" said Davies, in English.

"He's insatiable," said von Brüning, and there was a pause; clearly, they meant to elicit more.

"Well, I shall draw my own conclusions," I said.

"This is interesting," said von Brüning, "in what sense?"

"It begins to dawn on me that you made fools of us at Bensersiel. Don't you remember, Davies, what an interest he took in all our doings? I wonder if he feared our exploring propensities might possibly lead us to Memmert?"

"Upon my word, this is the blackest ingratitude. I thought I made myself particularly agreeable to you."

"Yes, indeed; especially about the duck shooting! How useful your local man would have been—both to us and to you!"

"Go on," said the commander, imperturbably.

"Wait a moment; I'm thinking it out." And thinking it out I was in deadly earnest, for all my levity, as I pressed my hand on my burning forehead and asked myself where I was to stop in this seductive, but perilous fraud. To carry it too far was to court complete exposure; to stop too soon was equally compromising.

"What is he talking about, and why go on with this ridiculous mystery?" said Frau Dollmann.

"I was thinking about this supper party, and the way it came about," I pursued, slowly.

"Nothing to complain of, I hope?" said Dollmann.

"Of course not! Impromptu parties are always the pleasantest, and this one was delightfully impromptu. Now I bet you I know its origin! Didn't you discuss us at Memmert? And didn't one of you suggest——"

"One would almost think you had been there," said Dollmann.

"You may thank your vile climate that we weren't," I retorted, laughing. "But, as I was saying, didn't one of you suggest—which of you? Well, I'm sure it wasn't the commander——"

"Why not?" said Böhme.

"It's difficult to explain—an intuition, say—I am sure he stood up for us; and I don't think it was Herr Dollmann, because he knows Davies already, and he's always on the spot; and, in short, I'll swear it was Herr Böhme, who is leaving early to-morrow, and had never seen either of us. It was you, sir, who proposed that we should be asked to supper to-night—for inspection?"

"Inspection?" said Böhme; "what an extraordinary idea!"

"You can't deny it, though! And one thing more; in the harbour just now—no—this is going too far; I shall mortally offend you." I gave way to hearty laughter.

"Come, let's have it. Your hallucinations are diverting."

"If you insist; but this is rather a delicate matter. You know we were a little surprised to find you *all* on board; and you, Herr Böhme, did you always take such a deep interest in small yachts? I am afraid that it was at a certain sacrifice of comfort that you *inspected* ours!" And I glanced at the token he bore of his encounter with our lintel. There was a burst of pent-up merriment, in which Dollmann took the loudest share.

"I warned you, Böhme," he said.

The engineer took the joke in the best possible part. "We owe you apologies," he conceded.

"Don't mention it," said Davies.

"*He* doesn't mind," I said; "I'm the injured one. I'm sure you never suspected Davies, who could?" (Who indeed? I was on firm ground there.) "The point is, what did you take *me* for?"

"Perhaps we take you for it still," said von Brüning.

"Oho! Still suspicious? Don't drive me to extremities."

"What extremities?"

"When I get back to London I shall go to Lloyd's! I haven't forgotten that flaw in the title." There was an impressive silence.

"Gentlemen," said Dollmann, with exaggerated solemnity, "we must come to terms with this formidable young man. What do you say?"

"Take me to Memmert," I exclaimed, "Those are my terms!"

"Take you to Memmert? But thought you were starting for Englan to-morrow?"

"I ought to; but I'll stay for that."

"You said it was urgent. You conscience is very elastic."

"That's my affair. Will you tak me to Memmert?"

"What do you say, gentlemen?" Böhme nodded. "I think we ow some reparation. Under promise o absolute secrecy, then?"

"Of course, now that you trust me But you'll show me everything—honour bright—wreck, depot, and all?"

"Everything; if you don't object to a diver's dress."

"Victory!" I cried, in triumph. "We've won our point, Davies. And now, gentlemen, I don't mind saying that as far as I am concerned the joke's at end; and, in spite of your kind offer, I must start for England to-morrow under the good Herr Böhme's wing. And in case my elastic conscience troubles you (for I see you think me a weather-cock) here are the letters I received this morning, establishing my identity as a humble but respectable clerk in the British Civil Service, summoned away from his holiday by a tyrannical superior." (I pulled out my letters and tossed them to Dollmann.) "Ah, you don't read English easily, perhaps? I dare say Herr Böhme does."

Leaving Böhme to study dates, postmarks, and contents to his heart's content and unobserved, I turned to sympathise with my fair neighbour, who complained that her head was going round; and no wonder. But at this juncture, and very much to my surprise, Davies struck in.

"*I* should like to go to Memmert," he said.

"You?" said von Brüning. "Now, I'm surprised at that."

"But you won't be staying here either, Davies," I objected.

"Yes, I shall," said Davies. "Why, I told you I should. If you leave me in the lurch like this I must have time to look round."

"You needn't pretend that you cannot sail alone," said von Brüning.

"It's much more fun with two; I think I shall wire for another friend. Meanwhile, I should like to see Memmert."

"That's only an excuse, I'm afraid," said I.

"I want to shoot ducks too," pursued Davies, reddening. "I always have wanted to; and you promised to help in that, commander."

"You can't get out of it now," I laughed.

"Certainly not," said he, unmoved; "but, honestly, I should advise Herr Davies, if he is ever going to get home this season, to make the best of this fine weather."

"It's too fine," said Davies; "I prefer wind. If I cannot get a friend I think I shall stop cruising, leave the yacht here, and come back for her next year."

There was some mute telegraphy between the allies.

"You can leave her in my charge," said Dollmann, "and start with your friend to-morrow."

"Thanks; but there is no hurry," said Davies, growing redder than ever. "I like Norderney — and we might have another sail in your dinghy, fräulein," he blurted out.

"Thank you," she said, in that low dry voice I had heard yesterday; "but I think I shall not be sailing again— it is getting too cold."

"Oh, no!" said Davies, "it's splendid." But she had turned to von Brüning, and took no notice.

"Well, send me a report about Memmert, Davies," I laughed, with the idea of drawing attention from his rebuff. But Davies, having once delivered his soul, seemed to have lost his shyness, and only gazed at his neighbour with the placid, dogged expression that I knew so well. That was the end of those delicate topics; and conviviality grew apace.

I am not indifferent at any time to good wine and good cheer, nor was it for lack of pressing that I drank as sparingly as I was able, and pretended to a greater elation than I felt. Nor certainly was it from any fine scruples as to the character of the gentleman whose hospitality we were receiving— scruples which I knew affected Davies, who ate little and drank nothing. In any case he was adamant in such matters, and I verily believe would at any time have preferred our own little paraffin-flavoured messes to the best dinner in the world. It was a very wholesome caution that warned me not to abuse the finest brain tonic ever invented by the wit of man. I had finessed Memmert, as one finesses a low card when holding a higher; but I had too much respect for our adversaries to trade on any fancied security we had won thereby. They had allowed me to win the trick, but I credited them with a better knowledge of my hand than they chose to show. On the other hand I hugged the axiom that in all conflicts it is just as fatal to underrate the difficulties of your enemy, as to overrate your own. Their chief one —and it multiplied a thousandfold the excitement of the contest—was, I felt sure, the fear of striking in error; of using a sledge-hammer to break a nut. In breaking it they risked publicity, and publicity, I felt convinced, was death to their secret. So, even supposing they had detected the finesse, and guessed that we had in fact got wind of imperial designs; yet, even so, I counted on immunity so long as they thought we were on the wrong scent, with Memmert, and Memmert alone as the source of our suspicions.

Had it been necessary I was prepared to encourage such a view, admitting that the cloth von Brüning wore had made his connection with Memmert curious, and had suggested to Davies, for I should have put it on him, with his naval enthusiasms, that the wreck-works were really naval-defence works. If they went further, and suspected that we had tried to go to Memmert that very day, the position was worse, but not desperate; for the fear that they would take the final step and suppose that we had actually got there and overheard their talk, I flatly refused to entertain, until I should find myself under arrest.

Precisely how near we came to it I shall never rightly know; but I have good reason to believe that we trembled on the verge. The main issue was fully enough for me, and it was only in passing flashes that I followed the play of the warring undercurrents. And yet, looking back on the scene, I would warrant there was no party of seven in Europe that evening where a student of human documents

would have found so rich a field, such noble and ignoble ambitions, such base and holy fears, aye, and such pitiful agonies of the spirit. Roughly divided though we were into separate camps, no two of us were wholly at one. Each wore a mask in the grand imposture; excepting, I am inclined to think, the lady on my left, who, outside her own well-being, which she cultivated without reserve, had, as far as I could see, but one axe to grind—the intimacy of von Brüning and her stepdaughter—and ground it openly.

Not even Böhme and von Brüning were wholly at one; and as moral distances are reckoned, Davies and I were leagues apart. Sitting between Dollmann and Dollmann's daughter, the living and breathing symbols of the two polar passions he had sworn to harmonise, he kept an equilibrium which, though his aims were nominally mine, I could not attain to. For me the man was the central figure; if I had attention to spare it was on him that I bestowed it; groping disgustfully after his hidden springs of action, noting the evidences of great gifts squandered and prostituted; questioning where he was most vulnerable; whom he feared most, us or his colleagues; whether he was open to remorse or shame; or whether he meditated further crime. The girl was incidental. After the first shock of surprise I had soon enough discovered that she, like the rest, had assumed a disguise; for she was far too innocent to sustain the deception, and yesterday was fresh in my memory. I was forced to continue turning her assumed character to account; but it would be pharisaical in me to say that I rose to any moral heights in her regard—wine and excitement had deadened my better nature to that extent. I thought she looked prettier than ever, and, as time passed, I fell into a cynical carelessness about her. This glimpse of her home life, and the desperate expedients to which she was driven (whether by compulsion or from her own regard for Davies) to repel and dismiss him, did not strike me as they might have done as the crowning argument in favour of the course we had adopted the night before, that of compassing our end without noise and scandal, disarming Dollmann, but aiding him to escape from the allies he had betrayed. To Davies, the man, if not a pure abstraction, was at most a noxious vermin to be trampled on for the public good; while the girl, in her blackguardly surroundings, and with her sinister future, had become the very source of his impulse.

And the other players? Böhme was *my* abstraction, the fortress whose foundations we were sapping, the embodiment of that systematised force which is congenital to the German people. In von Brüning, the personal factor was uppermost. Callous as I was this evening, I could not help wondering occasionally, as he talked and laughed with Clara Dollmann, what in his innermost thoughts, knowing her father, he felt and meant. It is a point I cannot and would not pursue, and, thank Heaven, it does not matter now; yet, with fuller knowledge of the facts, and, I trust, a mellower judgment, I often return to the same debate, and, by I know not what illogical bypaths, always arrive at the same conclusion, that I liked the man and like him still.

We behaved as sportsmen in the matter of time, giving them over two hours to make up their minds about us. It was only when tobacco smoke and heat brought back my faintness, and a twinge of cramp warned me that human strength has limits, that I rose and said we must go; that I had to make an early start to-morrow. I am hazy about the farewells, but I think that Dollmann was the most cordial, to me at any rate, and I augured good therefrom. Böhme said he should see me again. Von Brüning, though bound for the harbour also, considered it was far too early to be going yet, and said good-bye.

"You want to talk us over," I remember saying, with the last flicker of gaiety I could muster.

We were in the streets again, under a silver, breathless night; dizzily footing the greasy ladder again; in the cabin again, where I collapsed on a sofa just as I was, and slept such a deep and stringent sleep that the men of the *Blitz's* launch might have handcuffed and trussed and carried me away, without incommoding me in the least.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

I DOUBLE BACK

"GOOD-BYE, old chap," called Davies.

"Good-bye." The whistle blew and the ferry-steamer forged ahead, leaving Davies on the quay, bareheaded and wearing his old Norfolk jacket and stained grey flannels, as at our first meeting in Flensburg station. There was no bandaged hand this time, but he looked pinched and depressed; his eyes had black circles round them; and again I felt that same indefinable pathos in him.

"Your friend is in low spirits," said Böhme, who was installed on a seat beside me, voluminously caped and rugged against the biting air. It was a still, sunless day.

"So am I," I grunted, and it was the literal truth. I was only half awake, felt unwashed and dissipated, heavy in head and limbs. But for Davies I should never have been where I was. It was he who had patiently coaxed me out of my bunk, packed my bag, fed me with tea and an omelette (to which I believe he had devoted peculiarly tender care), and generally mothered me for departure. While I swallowed my second cup he was brushing the mould and smoothing the dents from my felt hat, which had been entombed for a month in the sail-locker; working at it with a remorseful concern in his face. The only initiative I am conscious of having shown was in the matter of my bag. "Put in my sea clothes, oils, and all," I had said; "I may want them again." There was mortal need of a thorough consultation, but this was out of the question. Davies did not badger or complain, but only timidly asked me how we were to meet and communicate, a question on which my mind was an absolute blank.

"Look out for me about the 26th," I suggested, feebly.

Before we left the cabin he gave me a scrap of pencilled paper and saw that it went safely into my pocket-book. "Look at it in the train," he said.

Unable to cope with Böhme, I paced the deck aimlessly as we swung round the See-Gat into the Buse Tief, trying to identify the point where we crossed it yesterday blindfold. But the tide was full, and the waters blank for miles round till they merged in haze. Soon I drifted down into the saloon, and crouching over a stove pulled out that scrap of paper. In a crabbed, boyish hand, and much besmudged with tobacco ashes, I found the following notes:—

"(1) *Your journey.** Norddeich 8.58, Emden 10.32, Leer 11.16 (Böhme changes for Bremen), Rheine 1.8 (change), Amsterdam 7.17 p.m. Leave again *via* Hook 8.52, London 9 a.m.

"(2) The coast-station—*their* rondezvous—querry is it *Norden?* (You pass it 9.13)—there is a tidal creek up to it. High water there on 25th, say 10.30 to 11 p.m. It cannot be Norddeich, which I find has a dredged-out low-water channel for the steamer, so 'tide serves' would not apply.

"(3) *Your other clews* (tugs, pilots, depths, railway, Esens, seven of something). Querry: Scheme of defence by land and sea for North Sea Coast?

"*Sea*—7 islands, 7 channels between (counting West Ems), very small depths (what you said) in most of them. Tugs and pilots for patrol work behind islands, as I always said. Querry: Rondezvous is for inspecting channels?

"*Land*—Look at railway (map in ulster pocket) running in a loop all round Friesland, a few miles from coast. Querry: To be used as line of communication for army corps. Troops could be quickly sent to any threatened point. *Esens* the base? It is in top centre of loop. Von Brooning dished us fairly over that at Bensersiel.

"*Chatham*—D. was spying after our naval plans for war with Germany.

"Von Brooning runs naval part over here.

"Where does Burmer come in? Querry—you go to Bremen and find out about him?"

I nodded stupidly over this document—so stupidly that I found myself wondering whether Burmer was a place or a person. Then I dozed, to wake with a violent start and find the paper

* See Maps A and B.

on the floor. Panic-stricken, I hid it away, and went on deck, when I found we were close to Norddeich, running up to the bleakest of bleak jetties thrown out from the dyke-bound polders of the mainland. Böhme and I landed together, and he was at my elbow as I asked for a ticket for Amsterdam, and was given one as far as Rheine, a junction near the Dutch frontier. He was ensconced in an opposite corner to me in the railway carriage, looking like an Indian idol. "Where do you come in?" I pondered, dreamily. Too sleepy to talk, I could only blink at him, sitting bolt upright with my arms folded over my precious pocket-book. Finally, I gave up the struggle, buttoned my ulster tightly up, and turning my back upon him with an apology, lay down to sleep, the precious pocket nethermost. He was at liberty to rifle my bag if he chose, and I dare say he did. I cannot say, for from this point till Rheine, for the best part of four hours, that is, I had only two lucid intervals.

The first was at Emden, where we both had to change. Here, as we pushed our way down the crowded platform, Böhme, after being greeted respectfully by several persons, was at last buttonholed without means of escape by an obsequious gentleman, whose description is of no moment, but whose conversation is. It was about a canal; what canal I did not gather, though, from a name dropped, I afterwards identified it as one in course of construction as a feeder to the Ems. The point is that the subject was canals. At the moment it was seed dropped in unreceptive soil, but it germinated later. I passed on, mingling with the crowd, and was soon asleep again in another carriage where Böhme this time did not follow me.

The second occasion was at Leer, where I heard myself called by name, and woke to find him at the window. He had to change trains, and had come to say good-bye. "Don't forget to go to Lloyd's," he grated in my ear. I expect it was a wan smile that I returned, for I was at a very low ebb, and my fortress looked sarcastically impregnable. But the sapper was free: "free" was my last conscious thought.

Even after Rheine, where I changed for the last time, a brutish drowsiness enchained me, and the afternoon was well advanced before my faculties began to revive.

The train crept like a snail from station to station. I might, so a fellow-passenger told me, have waited three hours at Rheine for an express which would have brought me to Amsterdam at about the same time; or, if I had chosen to break the journey further back, two hours at either Emden or Leer would still have enabled me to catch the said express at Rheine. These alternatives had escaped Davies, and, I surmised, had been suppressed by Böhme, who doubtless did not want me behind him, free either to double back or to follow him to Bremen.

The pace, then, was execrable, and there were delays; we were behind time at Hengelo, thirty minutes late at Apeldoorn; so that I might well have grown nervous about my connections at Amsterdam, which were in some jeopardy. But as I battled out of my lethargy and began to take account of our position and prospects, quite a different thought at the outset affected me. Anxiety to reach London was swamped in reluctance to quit Germany, so that I found myself grudging every mile that I placed between me and the frontier. It was the old question of urgency. To-day was the 23rd. The visit to London meant a minimum absence of forty-eight hours, counting from Amsterdam; that is to say, that by travelling for two nights and one day, and devoting the other day to investigating Dollmann's past, it was humanly possible for me to be back on the Frisian coast on the evening of the 25th. Yes, I could be at Norden, if that was the "rondezvous," at 7 p.m. But what a scramble! No margin for delays, no physical respite. Some pasts take a deal of raking up—other persons may be affected; men are cautious, they trip you up with red tape; or the man who knows is out at lunch—a protracted lunch; or in the country—a protracted week-end. Will you see Mr. So-and-so, or leave a note? Oh! I know those public departments—from the inside! And the Admiralty! . . .

I saw myself baffled and racing back the same night to Germany, with two days wasted, arriving, good for nothing, at Norden, with no leisure to reconnoitre my ground; to be baffled again there, probably, for you cannot always count on fogs (as Davies said). Esens was another clue, and "to follow Burmer"—there was something in that notion. But I wanted time, and had I time? How long could Davies maintain himself at Norderney? Not so very long, from what I remembered of last night. And was he even safe there? A feverish dream recurred to me—a dream of Davies in a diving-dress; of a regrettable hitch in the air-supply—Stop, that was nonsense! . . . Let us be sane. What matter if he had to go? What matter if I took my time in London? Then with a flood of shame I saw Davies's wistful face on the quay, heard his grim ejaculation: "He's our game or no one's"; and my own sullen "Oh, I'll keep the secret!" London was utterly impossible. If I found my informant, what credentials had I, what claim to confidences? None, unless I told the whole story. Why, my mere presence in Whitehall would imperil the secret; for, once on my native heath, I should be recognised—possibly haled to judgment; at the best should escape in a cloud of rumour—"last heard of at Norderney"; "only this morning was raising Cain at the Admiralty about a mythical lieutenant." No! Back to Friesland, was the word. One night's rest—I must have that—between sheets, on a feather bed; one long, luxurious night, and then back refreshed to Friesland, to finish our work in our own way, and with none but our own weapons.

Having reached this resolve, I was nearly putting it into instant execution by alighting at Amersfoort, but thought better of it. I had a transformation to effect before I returned North, and the more populous centre I made it in the less it was likely to attract notice. Besides, I had in my mind's eye a perfect bed in a perfect hostelry hard by the Amstel River. It was an economy in the end.

So, at half-past eight I was sipping my coffee in the aforesaid hostelry, with a London newspaper before me, which was unusually interesting, and some German journals, which, "in hate of a wrong not theirs," were one and all seething with rancorous Anglophobia. At nine I was in the Jewish quarter, striking bargains in an infamous marine slop-shop. At half-past nine I was despatching this unscrupulous telegram to my chief—"Very sorry, could not call Norderney; hope extension all right; please write to Hôtel du Louvre, Paris." At ten I was in the perfect bed, rapturously flinging my limbs abroad in its glorious redundancies. And at 8.28 on the following morning, with a novel chilliness about the upper lip, and a vast excess of strength and spirits, I was sitting in a third-class carriage, bound for Germany, and dressed as a young seaman, in a pea-jacket, peaked cap, and comforter.

The transition had not been difficult. I had shaved off my moustache and breakfasted hastily in my bedroom, ready equipped for a journey in my ulster and cloth cap. I had dismissed the hotel porter at the station, and left my bag at the cloak-room, after taking out of it an umber bundle and substituting the ulster. The umber bundle, which consisted of my oilskins, and within them my sea-boots and a few other garments and necessaries, the whole tied up with a length of tarry rope, was now in the rack above me, and (with a stout stick) represented my luggage. Every article in it—I shudder at their origin—was in strict keeping with my humble *métier*, for I knew they were liable to search at the frontier custom-house; but there was a Baedeker of Northern Germany in my jacket pocket.

For the nonce, if questions were asked, I was an English seaman going to Emden to join a ship, with a ticket as far as the frontier. Beyond that a definite scheme of action had still to be thought out. One thing, however, was sure. I was determined to be at Norden to-morrow night, the 25th. A word about Norden, which is a small town seven miles south of Norddeich. When hurriedly scanning the map for coast stations in the cabin yesterday, I had not thought of Norden, because it did not appear to be on the coast, but Davies had noticed it while I slept,

and I now saw that his pencilled hint was a shrewd one. The creek he spoke of, though barely visible on the map,* flowed into the Ems Estuary in a south-westerly direction. The "night train" tallied to perfection, for high tide in the creek would be, as Davies estimated, between 10.30 and 11 p.m. on the night of the 25th; and the time-table showed that the only night train arriving at Norden was one from the south at 10.46 p.m. This looked promising. Emden, which I had inclined to on the spur of the moment, was out of court in comparison, for many reasons; not the least being that it was served by three trains between 9 p.m. and 1 a.m., so that the phrase "night train" would be ambiguous and not decisive as with Norden.

So far good; but how was I to spend the intervening time? Should I act on Davies's "querry" and go to Bremen after Böhme? I soon dismissed that idea. It was one to act upon if others failed; for the present it meant another scramble. Bremen is six hours from Norden by rail. I should spend a disproportionate amount of my limited time in trains, and I should want a different disguise. Besides, I had already learnt something fresh about Böhme; for the seed dropped at Emden Station yesterday had come to life. A submarine engineer I knew him to be before; I now knew that canals were another branch of his labours—not a very illuminating fact; but could I pick up more in a single day?

There remained Esens, and it was thither I resolved to go to-night—a tedious journey, lasting till past eight in the evening; but there I should only be an hour from Norden by rail.

And at Esens?

All day long I strove for light on the central mystery, collecting from my diary, my memory, my imagination, from the map, the time-table, and Davies's grubby jottings, every elusive atom of material. Sometimes I issued from a reverie with a start, to find a phlegmatic Dutch peasant staring strangely at me over his china pipe. I was more careful over the German border. Davies's paper I soon knew by heart. I pictured him writing it with his cramped fist in his corner by the stove, fighting against sleep, absently striking salvoes of matches, while I snored in my bunk; absently diverging into dreams, I knew, of a rose-brown face under dewy hair and a grey Tam-o'-shanter; though not a word of her came into the document. I smiled to see his undying faith in the "channel theory" reconciled at the eleventh hour, with new data touching the neglected "land."

The result was certainly interesting, but it left me cold. That there existed in the German archives some such scheme of defence for the North Sea coast was very likely indeed. The seven islands, with their seven shallow channels (though, by the way, two of them, the twin branches of the Ems, are by no means so shallow), were a very fair conjecture, and fitted in admirably with the channel theory, whose intrinsic merits I had always recognised; my constant objection having been that it did not go nearly far enough to account for our treatment. The ring of railway round the peninsula, with Esens at the apex, was suggestive too; but the same objection applied. Every country with a maritime frontier has, I suppose, secret plans of mobilisation for its defence, but they are not such as could be discovered by passing travellers, not such as would warrant stealthy searches, or require for their elaboration so recondite a meeting-place as Memmert. Dollmann was another weak point; Dollmann in England, spying. All countries, Germany included, have spies in their service, dirty though necessary tools; but Dollmann in such intimate association with the principal plotters on this side; Dollmann rich, influential, a power in local affairs—it was clear he was no ordinary spy.

And here I detected a hesitation in Davies's rough sketch, a reluctance, as it were, to pursue a clue to its logical end. He spoke of a German scheme of coast defence, and in the next breath of Dollmann spying for English plans in the event of war with Germany, and there he left the matter; but what sort of plans? Obviously (if he was on the

* See Map B.

right track) plans of attack on the German coast as opposed to those of strategy on the high seas. But what sort of an attack? Obviously again, if his railway-ring meant anything, an attack by invasion on that remote and desolate littoral which he had so often himself declared to be impregnably secure behind its web of sands and shallows. My mind went back to my question at Bensersiel, "Can this coast be invaded?" to his denial and our fruitless survey of the dykes and polders. Was he now reverting to a fancy we had both rejected, while shrinking from giving it explicit utterance? The doubt was tantalising.

A brief digression here about the phases of my journey. At Rheine I changed trains, turned due north and became a German seaman. There was little risk in a defective accent—sailors are so polyglot; while an English sailor straying about Esens might excite curiosity. Yesterday I had paid no heed to the landscape; to-day I neglected nothing that could conceivably supply a hint.

From Rheine to Emden we descended the valley of the Ems; at first through a land of thriving towns and fat pastures, degenerating further north to spaces of heathery bog and moorland—a sad country, but looking at its best, such as that was, for I should mention here that the weather, which in the early morning had been as cold and misty as ever, grew steadily milder and brighter as the day advanced; while my newspaper stated that the glass was falling and the anticyclone giving way to pressure from the Atlantic.

At Emden, where we entered Friesland proper, the train crossed a big canal, and for the twentieth time that day (for we had passed numbers of them in Holland, and not a few in Germany), I said to myself, "Canals, canals. Where does Böhme come in?" It was dusk, but light enough to see an unfamiliar craft, a torpedo-boat in fact, moored to stakes at one side. In a moment I remembered that page in the "North Sea Pilot" where the Ems-Jade Canal is referred to as deep enough to carry gun-boats, and as used for that strategic purpose between Wilhelmshaven and Emden, along the base, that is, of the Frisian peninsula. I asked a peasant opposite; yes, that was the Ems-Jade Canal. Had Davies forgotten it? It would have greatly strengthened his halting sketch.

At the bookstall at Emden I bought a pocket ordnance map* of Friesland, on a much larger scale than anything I had used before, and when I was unobserved studied the course of the canal, with an impatience which, alas! quickly cooled. From Emden northwards I used the same map to aid my eyesight, and with its help saw in the gathering gloom more heaths and bogs once a great glimmering lake, and at intervals cultivated tracts; a watery land as ever; pools, streams and countless drains and ditches. Extensive woods were marked also, but further inland. We passed Norden at seven, just dark. I looked out for the creek, and, sure enough, we crossed it just before entering the station. Its bed was nearly dry, and I distinguished barges lying aground in it. This being the junction for Esens, I had to wait three-quarters of an hour, and then turned east through the uttermost northern wilds, stopping at occasional village stations and keeping five or six miles from the sea. It was during this stage, in a wretchedly lit compartment, and alone for the most part, that I finally assembled all my threads and tried to weave them into a cable whose core should be Esens; "a town," so Baedeker said, "of 3,500 inhabitants, the centre of a rich agricultural district. Fine spire."

Esens is four miles inland from Bensersiel. I reviewed every circumstance of that day at Bensersiel, and boiled to think how von Brüning had tricked me. He had driven to Esens himself, and read me so well that he actually offered to take me with him, and I had refused from excess of cleverness. Stay, though; if I had happened to accept he would have taken very good care that I saw nothing important. The secret, therefore, was not writ large on the walls of Esens. Was it connected with Bensersiel too, or the country between? I searched the ordnance map

* There is, of course, no space to reproduce this, but here and henceforward the reader is referred to Map B.

again, standing up to get a better light and less jolting. There was the road northward from Esens to Bensersiel, passing through dots and chess-board squares, the former meaning fen, the latter fields, so the reference said. Something else, too, immediately caught my eye, and that was a stream running to Bensersiel. I knew it at once for the muddy stream or drain we had seen at the harbour, issuing through the sluice or *siel* from which Bensersiel took its name. But it arrested my attention now because it looked more prominent than I should have expected. Charts are apt to ignore the geography of the mainland, except in so far as it offers sea-marks to mariners. On the chart this stream had been shown as a rough little corkscrew, like a sucking-pig's tail. On the ordnance map it was marked with a dark blue line, was labelled "Benser Tief," and was given a more resolute course; bends became angles, and there were what appeared to be artificial straightnesses at certain points. One of the threads in my skein, the canal thread, tingled sympathetically, like a wire charged with current. Standing astraddle on both seats, with the map close to the lamp, I greedily followed the course of the "tief" southward. It inclined away from the road to Esens and passed the town about a mile to the west, diving underneath the railway. Soon after it took angular tacks to the eastward, and joined another blue line trending south-east, and lettered "Esens—Wittmunder *Canal*." This canal, however, came to an abrupt end halfway to Wittmund, a neighbouring town.

For the first time that day there came to me a sense of genuine inspiration. Those shallow depths and short distances, fractions of metres and kilometres, which I had overheard from Böhme's lips at Memmert, and which Davies had attributed to the outside channels—did they refer to a canal? I remembered seeing barges in Bensersiel harbour. I remembered conversation with the natives in the inn, scraps of the post-master's pompous loquacity; talks of growing trade, of bricks and grain passing from the interior to the islands; from another source—was it the grocer of Wangeroog?—of expansion of business in the islands themselves as bathing resorts; from another source, again—von Brüning himself, surely—of Dollmann's personal activity in the development of the islands. In obscure connection with these things, I saw the torpedo-boat in the Ems-Jade Canal.

It was between Dornum and Esens that these ideas came, and I was still absorbed in them when the train drew up, just upon nine o'clock, at my destination, and after ten minutes' walk, along with a handful of other passengers, I found myself in the quiet cobbled streets of Esens, with the great church steeple, that we had so often seen from the sea, soaring above me in the moonlight.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

THE SEVEN SIELS

SELECTING the very humblest *Gasthaus* I could discover, I laid down my bundle and called for beer, bread, and *Wurst*. The landlord, as I had expected, spoke the Frisian dialect, so that though he was rather difficult to understand, he had no doubts about the purity of my own high German accent. He was a worthy fellow, and hospitably interested: "Did I want a bed?" "No; I was going on to Bensersiel," I said, "to sleep there, and take the morning *Postschiff* to Langeoog Island." (I had not forgotten our friends the twin giants and their functions.) "I was not an islander myself?" he asked. "No, but I had a married sister there; had just returned from a year's voyaging, and was going to visit her." "By the way," I asked, "how are they getting on with the Benser Tief?" My friend shrugged his shoulders; it was finished, he believed. "And the connection to Wittmund?". "Under construction still." "Langeoog would be going ahead then?" "Oh! he

supposed so, but he did not believe in these new-fangled schemes." "But it was good for trade, I supposed? Esens would benefit in sending goods by the 'tief'—what was the traffic, by the way?" "Oh, a few more barge-loads than before of bricks, timber, coals, etc., but it would come to nothing *he* knew; *Aktiengesellschäfte* (companies) were an invention of the devil. A few speculators got them up and made money themselves out of land and contracts, while the shareholders they had hoodwinked starved." "There's something in that," I conceded to this bigoted old conservative; "my sister at Langeoog rents her lodging-house from a man named Dollmann; they say he owns a heap of land about. I saw his yacht once—pink velvet and electric light inside, they say——"

"That's the name," said mine host, "that's one of them—some sort of foreigner, I've heard; runs a salvage concern, too, Juist way."

"Well, he won't get any of my savings!" I laughed, and soon after took my leave, and inquired from a passer-by the road to *Dornum*. "Follow the railway," I was told.

With a warm wind in my face from the south-west, fleecy clouds and a half-moon overhead, I set out, not for Bensersiel but for Benser Tief, which I knew must cross the road to Dornum somewhere. A mile or so of cobbled causeway flanked with ditches and willows, and running cheek by jowl with the railway track; then a bridge, and below me the "Tief"; which was, in fact, a small canal. A rutty track left the road, and sloped down to it one side; a rough siding left the railway, and sloped down to it on the other.

I lit a pipe and sat on the parapet for a little. No one was stirring, so with great circumspection I began to reconnoitre the left bank to the north. The siding entered a fenced enclosure by a locked gate—a gate I could have easily climbed, but I judged it wiser to go round by the bridge again and look across. The enclosure was a small coal-store, nothing more; there were gaunt heaps of coal glittering in the moonlight; a barge half loaded lying alongside, and a deserted office building. I skulked along a sandy tow-path in solitude. Fens and field were round me, as the map had said; willows and osier-beds; the dim forms of cattle; the low melody of wind roaming unfettered over a plain; once or twice the flutter and quack of a startled wild-duck.

Presently I came to a farmhouse, dark and silent; opposite it, in the canal, a couple of empty barges. I climbed into one of these, and sounded with my stick on the off-side—barely three feet; and the torpedo-boat melted out of my speculations. The stream, I observed also, was only just wide enough for two barges to pass with comfort. Other farms I saw, or thought I saw, and a few more barges lying in side-cuts linked by culverts to the canal, but nothing noteworthy; and mindful that I had to explore the Wittmund side of the railway too, I turned back, already a trifle damped in spirits, but still keenly expectant.

Passing under the road and railway, I again followed the tow-path, which, after half a mile, plunged into woods, then entered a clearing and another fenced enclosure; a timber-yard by the look of it. This time I stripped from the waist downwards, waded over, dressed again, and climbed the paling. (There was a cottage standing back, but it occupants evidently slept.) I was in a timber-yard, by the stacks of wood and the steam saw-mill; but something more than a timber-yard, for as I warily advanced under the shadow of the trees at the edge of the clearing I came to a long tin shed which strangely reminded me of Memmert, and below it, nearer the canal, loomed a dark skeleton framework, which proved to be a half-built vessel on stocks. Close by was a similar object, only nearly completed—a barge. A paved slipway led to the water here, and the canal broadened to a siding or back-water, in which lay seven or eight more barges in tiers. I scaled another paling and went on, walking, I should think, three miles by the side of the canal, till the question of bed and ulterior plans brought me to a halt. It was past midnight, and I was adding little to my information. I had encountered a brickfield, but soon after that there was increasing proof that the

canal was as yet little used for traffic. It grew narrower, and there were many signs of recent labour for its improvement. In one place a dammed-off deviation was being excavated, evidently to abridge an impossible bend. The path had become atrocious, and my boots were heavy with clay. Bearing in mind the abruptly-ending blue line on the map, I considered it useless to go farther, and retraced my steps, trying to concoct a story which would satisfy an irritable Esens inn-keeper that it was a respectable wayfarer, and not a tramp or a lunatic, who knocked him up at half-past one or thereabouts.

But a much more practical resource occurred to me as I approached the timber-yard; for lodging, free and accessible, lay there ready to hand. I boarded one of the empty barges in the backwater, and surveyed my quarters for the night. It was of a similar pattern to all the others I had seen; a lighter, strictly, in the sense that it had no means of self-propulsion, and no separate quarters for a crew, the whole interior of the hull being free for cargo. At both bow and stern there were ten feet or so of deck, garnished with bitts and bollards. The rest was an open well, flanked by waterways of substantial breadth; the whole of stout construction and, for a humble lighter, of well-proportioned and even graceful design, with a marked forward sheer, and, as I had observed in the specimen on the stocks, easy lines at the stern. In short, it was apparent, even to an ignorant landsman like myself, that she was designed not merely for canal work but for rough water; and well she might be, for, though the few miles of sea she had to cross in order to reach the islands were both shallow and sheltered, I knew from experience what a vicious surf they could be whipped into by a sudden gale. It must not be supposed that I dwelt on this matter. On limited lines I was making progress, but the wings of imagination still drooped nervelessly at my sides. Otherwise I perhaps should have examined this lighter more particularly, instead of regarding it mainly as a convenient hiding-place. Under the stern-deck was stored a massive roll of tarpaulin, a corner of which made an excellent blanket, and my bundle a good pillow. It was a descent from the luxury of last night; but a spy, I reflected, philosophically, cannot expect a feather bed two nights running, and this one was at any rate airier and roomier than the coffin-like bunk of the *Dulcibella*, and not so very much harder.

When snugly ensconced, I studied the map by intermittent match-light. It had been dawning on me in the last half-hour that this canal was only one of several; that in concentrating myself on Esens and Bensersiel, I had forgotten that there were other villages ending in *siel*, also furnished on the chart with corkscrew streams; and, moreover, that Böhme's statistics of depth and distance had been marshalled in seven categories, A to G. The very first match brought full recollection as to the villages. The suffix *siel* repeated itself all round the coast-line. Five miles eastward of Bensersiel was Neu-harlingersiel, and further on Carolinensiel. Four miles westward was Dornumersiel; and further on Nessmersiel and Hilgenriedersiel. That was six on the north coast of the peninsula alone. On the west coast, facing the Ems, there was only one, Greetsiel, a good way south of Norden. But on the east, facing the Jade, there were no less than eight, at very close intervals. A moment's thought and I disregarded this latter group; they had nothing to do with Esens, nor had they any imaginable *raison d'être* as veins for commerce; differing markedly in this respect from the group of six on the north coast, whose outlook was the chain of islands, and whose inland centre, almost exactly, was Esens. I still wanted one to make seven, and as a working hypothesis added the solitary Greetsiel. At all seven villages streams debouched, as at Bensersiel. From all seven points of issue dotted lines were marked seaward, intersecting the great tidal sands and leading towards the islands. And on the mainland behind the whole sevenfold system ran the loop of railway. But there were manifold minor points of difference. No stream boasted so deep and decisive a blue line as did Benser Tief; none penetrated so far into the Hinterland. They varied

in length and sinuosity. Two, those belonging to Hilgenriedersiel and Greetsiel, appeared not to reach the railway at all. On the other hand, Carolinensiel, opposite Wangeroog Island, had a branch line all to itself.

Match after match waxed and waned as I puzzled over the mystic seven. In the end I puzzled myself to sleep, with the one fixed idea that to-morrow, on my way back to Norden, I must see more of these budding canals, if such they were. My dreams that night were of a mighty chain of redoubts and masked batteries couching *perdus* among the sand dunes of desolate islets; built, coral-like, by infinitely slow and secret labour; fed by lethal cargoes borne in lighters and in charge of stealthy mutes who, one and all, bore the likeness of Grimm. I was up and away at daylight (the weather mild and showery), meeting some navvies on my way back to the road, who gave me good morning and a stare. On the bridge I halted and fell into torments of indecision. There was so much to do and so little time to do it in. The whole problem seemed to have been multiplied by seven, and the total again doubled and redoubled—seven blue lines on land, seven dotted lines on the sea, seven islands in the offing. Once I was near deciding to put my pretext into practice, and cross to Langeoog; but that meant missing the rendezvous, and I was loth to do that.

At any rate, I wanted breakfast badly; and the best way to get it, and at the same time to open new ground, was to walk to Dornum. Then I should find a blue line called the *Neues Tief*, leading to Dornumersiel on the coast. That explored, I could pass on to Nesse, where there was another blue line to Nessmersiel. All this was on the way to Norden, and I should have the railway constantly at my back, to carry me there in the evening. The last train (my time-table told me) was one reaching Norden at 7.15 p.m. I could catch this at Hage Station at 7.5.

A brisk walk of six miles brought me, ravenously hungry, to Dornum. Road and railway had clung together all the time, and about half-way had been joined on the left by a third companion in the shape of a puny stream which I knew from the map to be the upper portion of Neues Tief. Wriggling and doubling like an eel, choked with sedges and reeds, it had no pretensions to being navigable. At length it looped away into the fens out of sight, only to reappear again close to Dornum in a much more dignified guise.

There was no siding where the railway crossed it, but at the town itself, which is skirted on the east, a tow-path began, and a piled wharf had been recently constructed. Going on to this was a red brick building with the look of a warehouse, roofless as yet, and with workmen on its scaffolds. It sharpened the edge of my appetite.

If I had been wise I should have been content with a snack bought at a counter, but a thirst for hot coffee and clues induced me to repeat the experiment of Esens and seek a primitive beer-house. I was less lucky on this occasion. The house I chose was obscure enough, but its proprietor was no simple Frisian, but an ill-looking rascal with shifty eyes and a debauched complexion, who showed a most unwelcome curiosity in his customer. As a last fatality, he wore a peaked cap like my own, and turned out to be an ex-sailor. I should have fled at the sight of him had I had the chance, but I was attended to first by a slatternly girl who, I am sure, called him up to view me. To explain my muddy boots and trousers I said I had walked from Esens, and from that I found myself involved in a tangle of impromptu lies. Floundering down an old groove, I placed my sister this time on Baltrum Island, and said I was going to Dornumersiel (which is opposite Baltrum) to cross from there. As this was drawing a bow at a venture, I dared not assume local knowledge, and spoke of the visit as my first. Dornumersiel was a lucky shot; there *was* a ferry-galliot from there to Baltrum; but he knew, or pretended to know, Baltrum, and had not heard of my sister. I grew the more nervous in that I saw from the first that he took me to be of better condition than most merchant seamen; and, to make matters worse, I was imprudent enough in pleading haste to pull out from an inner pocket my gold watch with the

chain and seals attached. He told me there was no hurry, that I should miss the tide at Dornumersiel, and then fell to pressing strong waters on me, and asking questions whose insinuating grossness gave me the key to his biography. He must have been at one stage in his career a dock-side crimp, one of those foul sharks who prey on discharged seamen, and as often as not are ex-seamen themselves, versed in the weaknesses of the tribe. He was now keeping his hand in with me, who, unhappily, purported to belong to the very class he was used to victimise, and, moreover, had a gold watch, and, doubtless, a full purse. Nothing more ridiculously inopportune could have befallen me, or more dangerous; for his class are as cosmopolitan as waiters and *concierges*, with as facile a gift for language and as unerring a scent for nationality. Sure enough, the fellow recognised mine, and positively challenged me with it in fairly fluent English with a Yankee twang. Encumbered with the mythical sister, of course I stuck to my lie, said I had been on an English ship so long that I had picked up the accent, and also gave him some words in broken English. At the same time I showed I thought him an impertinent nuisance, paid my score and walked out—quit of him? Not a bit of it! He insisted on showing me the way to Dornumersiel, and followed me down the street. Perceiving that he was in liquor, in spite of the early hour, I dared not risk a quarrelsome scene with a man who already knew so much about me, and might at any moment elicit more. So I melted, and humoured him; treated him in a ginshop in the hope of giving him the slip—a disastrous resource, which was made a precedent for further potations elsewhere. I would gladly draw a veil over our scandalous progress through peaceable Dornum, of the terrors I experienced when he introduced me as his friend, and as his English friend, and of the abasement I felt, too, as, linked arm in arm, we trod the three miles of road coastwards. It was his malicious whim that we should talk English; a fortunate whim, as it turned out, because I knew no fo'c'sle German, but had a smattering of fo'c'sle English, gathered from Cutcliffe Hyne and Kipling. With these I extemporised a disreputable hybrid, mostly consisting of oaths and blasphemies, and so yarned of imaginary voyages. Of course he knew every port in the world, but happily was none too critical, owing to repeated *schnappsen*.

Nevertheless, it was a deplorable *contretemps* from every point of view. I was wasting my time, for the road took a different direction to the Neues Tief, so that I had not even the advantage of inspecting the canal, and only met with it when we reached the sea. Here it split into two mouths, both furnished with locks, and emptying into two little mud-hole harbours, replicas of Bensersiel, each owning its cluster of houses. I made straight for the *Gasthaus* at Dornumersiel, primed my companion well, and asked him to wait while I saw about a boat in the harbour; but, needless to say, I never rejoined him. I just took a cursory look at the left-hand harbour, saw a lighter locking through (for the tide was high), and then walked as fast as my legs would carry me to the outermost dyke, mounted it, and strode along the sea westwards in the teeth of a smart shower of rain, full of deep apprehensions as to the stir and gossip my disappearance might cause if my odious crimp was sober enough to discover it. As soon as I deemed it safe, I dropped on to the sand and ran till I could run no more. Then I sat on my bundle with my back to the dyke in partial shelter from the rain, watching the sea recede from the flats and dwindle into slender meres, and the laden clouds fly weeping over the islands till those pale shapes were lost in mist.

The barge I had seen locking through was creeping across towards Langeoog behind a tug and a wisp of smoke.

No more exploration by daylight! That was my first resolve, for I felt as if the country must be ringing with reports of an Englishman in disguise. I must remain in hiding till dusk, then regain the railway and slink into that train to Norden. Now directly I began to resign myself to temporary inaction, and to centre my thoughts on the rendezvous, a new doubt assailed me,

Nothing had seemed more certain yesterday than that Norden was the scene of the rendezvous, but that was before the seven *siels* had come into prominence. The name Norden now sounded naked and unconvincing. As I wondered why, it suddenly occurred to me that *all* the stations along this northern line, though further inland than Norden, were equally "coast stations," in the sense that they were in touch with harbours (of a sort) on the coast. Norden had its tidal creek, but Esens and Dornum had their "tiefs" or canals. Fool that I had been to put such a narrow and literal construction on the phrase "the tide serves!" Which was it more likely that my conspirators would visit—Norden, whose intrusion into our theories was purely hypothetical, or one of these *siels* to whose sevenfold system all my latest observations gave such transcendent significance?

There was only one answer; and it filled me with profound discouragement. Seven possible rendezvous!—eight, counting Norden. Which to make for? Out came the time-table and map, and with them hope. The case was not so bad after all; it demanded no immediate change of plan, though it imported grave uncertainties and risks. Norden was still the objective, but mainly as a railway junction, only remotely as a seaport. Though the possible rendezvous were eight, the possible stations were reduced to five—Norden, Hage, Dornum, Esens, Wittmund—all on one single line. Trains from east to west along this line were negligible, because there were none that could be called night trains, the latest being the one I had this morning fixed on to bring me to Norden, where it arrived at 7.15. Of trains from west to east there was only one that need be considered, the same one that I had travelled by last night, leaving Norden at 7.43 and reaching Esens at 8.50, and Wittmund at 9.13. This train, as the reader who was with me in it knows, was in correspondence with another from Emden and the south, and also, I now found, with services from Hanover, Bremen, and Berlin. He will also remember that I had to wait three-quarters of an hour at Norden, from 7 to 7.43.

The platform at Norden Junction, therefore, between 7.15, when I should arrive at it *from* the east, and 7.43 when Böhme and his unknown friend should leave it *for* the east; there, and in that half-hour was my opportunity for recognising and shadowing two at least of the conspirators. I must take the train they took, and alight where they alighted. If I could not find them at all I should be thrown back on the rejected view that Norden itself was the rendezvous, and should wait there till 10.46.

In the meantime it was all very well to resolve on inaction till dusk; but after an hour's rest, damp clothes and feet, and the absence of pursuers, tempted me to take the field again. Avoiding roads and villages as long as it was light, I cut across country south-westwards—a dismal and laborious journey, with oozy fens and knee-deep drains to course, with circuits to be made to pass clear of peasants, and many furtive crouchings behind dykes and willows. What little I learnt was in harmony with previous explorations, for my track cut at right angles the line of the Harke Tief, the stream issuing at Nessmersiel. It, too, was in the nature of a canal, but only in embryo at the point I touched it, south of Nesse. Works on a deviation were in progress, and in a short digression down stream I sighted another lighter-building yard. As for Hilgenriedersiel, the fourth of the seven, I had no time to see anything of it at all. At seven o'clock I was at Hage Station, very tired, wet, and footsore, after covering nearly twenty miles all told since I left my bed in the lighter.

From here to Norden it was a run in the train of ten minutes, which I spent in eating some rye bread and smoked eel, and in scraping the mud off my boots and trousers. Fatigue vanished when the train drew up at the station, and the momentous twenty-eight minutes began to run their course. Having donned a bulky muffler and turned up the collar of my pea-jacket, I crossed over immediately to the up-platform, walked boldly to the booking-office, and at once sighted—von Brüning—yes, von Brüning in mufti; but there was no mistaking his tall athletic figure, pleasant features, and neat brown beard.

He was just leaving the window, gathering up a ticket and some coins. I joined a *queue* of three or four persons who were waiting their turn, flattened myself between them and the partition till I heard him walk out. Not having heard what station he had booked for, I took a fourth-class ticket to Wittmund, which covered all chances. Then, with my chin buried in my muffler, I sought the darkest corner of the ill-lit combination of bar and waiting-room where, by the tiresome custom in Germany, would-be travellers are penned till their train is ready. Von Brüning I perceived sitting in another corner, with his hat over his eyes and a cigar between his lips. A boy brought me a tankard of tawny Munich beer, and, sipping it, I watched. People passed in and out, but nobody spoke to the sailor in mufti. When a quarter of an hour elapsed, a platform door opened, and a raucous voice shouted: "Hage, Dornum, Esens, Wittmund!" A knot of passengers jostled out to the platform, showing their tickets. I was slow over my beer, and was last of the knot, with von Brüning immediately ahead of me, so close that his cigar smoke curled into my face. I looked over his shoulder at the ticket he showed, missed the name, but caught a muttered double sibilant from the official who checked it; ran over the stations in my head, and pounced on *Esens*. That was as much as I wanted to know for the present; so I made my way to a fourth-class compartment, and lost sight of my quarry, not venturing, till the last door had banged, to look out of the window. When I did so two late arrivals were hurrying up to a carriage—one tall, one of middle height; both in cloaks and comforters. Their features I could not distinguish, but certainly neither of them was Böhme. They had not come through the waiting-room door, but, plainly, from the dark end of the platform, where they had been waiting. A guard, with some surly remonstrances, shut them in, and the train started.

Esens—the name had not surprised me; it fulfilled a presentiment that had been growing in strength all the afternoon. For the last time I referred to the map, pulpy and blurred with the day's exposure, and tried to etch it into my brain. I marked the road to Bensersiel, and how it converged by degrees on the Benser Tief until they met at the sea. "The tide serves!" Longing for Davies to help me, I reckoned, by the aid of my diary, that high tide at Bensersiel would be about eleven, and for two hours, I remembered (say from ten to twelve to-night), there were from five to six feet of water in the harbour.

We should reach Esens at 8.50. Would they drive, as von Brüning had done a week ago? I tightened my belt, stamped my mud-burdened boots, and thanked God for the Munich beer. Whither were they going from Bensersiel, and in what; and how was I to follow them? These were nebulous questions, but I was in fettle for anything; boat-stealing was a bagatelle. Fortune, I thought, smiled; Romance beckoned; even the sea looked kind. Ay, and I do not know but that Imagination was already beginning to unstiffen and flutter those nerveless wings.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

THE LUCK OF THE STOWAWAY

At Esens Station I reversed my Norden tactics, jumped out smartly, and got to the door of egress first of all, gave up my ticket, and hung about the gate of the station under cover of darkness. Fortune smiled still; there was no vehicle in waiting at all, and there were only half a dozen passengers. Two of these were the cloaked gentlemen who had been so nearly left behind at Norden, and another was von Brüning. The latter walked well in advance of the first pair, but at the gate on to the high road the three showed a common purpose, in that, unlike the rest, who turned towards Esens town, they turned southwards; much to my perplexity, for this was the contrary

direction to Bensersiel and the sea. I, with my bundle on my shoulder, had been bringing up the rear, and, as their faithful shadow, turned to the right too, without foreseeing the consequence. When it was too late to turn back I saw that, fifty yards ahead, the road was barred by the gates of a level crossing, and that the four of us must inevitably accumulate at the barrier till the train had steamed away. This, in fact, happened, and for a minute or two we were all in a group, elaborately indifferent to one another, silent, but I am sure very conscious. As for me, "secret laughter tickled all my soul." When the gates were opened the three seemed disposed to lag, so I tactfully took my cue, trudged briskly on ahead, and stopped after a few minutes to listen. Hearing nothing I went cautiously back and found that they had disappeared; in which direction was not long in doubt, for I came on a grassy path leading into the fields on the left or west of the road, and though I could see no one I heard the distant murmur of receding voices.

I took my bearings collectedly, placed one foot on the path, thought better of it, and turned back towards Esens. I knew without reference to the map that that path would bring them to the Benser Tief at a point somewhere near the timber-yard. In a fog I might have followed them there; as it was, the night was none too dark, and I had my strength to husband; and stamped on my memory were the words "the tide serves." I judged it a wiser use of time and sinew to anticipate them at Bensersiel by the shortest road, leaving them to reach it by way of the devious Tief, to examine which was, I felt convinced, one of their objects.

It was nine o'clock of a fresh wild night, a halo round the beclouded moon. I passed through quiet Esens, and in an hour I was close to Bensersiel, and could hear the sea. In the rooted idea that I should find Grimm on the outskirts, awaiting visitors, I left the road short of the village, and made a circuit to the harbour by way of the sea-wall. The lower windows of the inn shed a warm glow into the night, and within I could see the village circle gathered over cards, and dominated as of old by the assertive little postmaster, whose high-pitched, excitable voice I could clearly distinguish, as he sat with his cap on the back of his head and a "feine schnapps" at his elbow. The harbour itself looked exactly the same as I remembered it a week ago. The post-boat lay in her old berth at the eastern jetty, her mainsail set and her twin giants spitting over the rail. I hailed them boldly from the shore (without showing them who I was), and was told they were starting for Langeoog in a few minutes; the wind was off-shore, the mails aboard, and the water just high enough. "Did I want a passage?" "No, I thought I would wait." Positive that my party could never have got here so soon, I nevertheless kept an eye on the galliot till she let go her stern-rope and slid away. One contingency was eliminated. Some loiterers dispersed, and all port business appeared to be ended for the night.

Three-quarters of an hour of strained suspense ensued. Most of it I spent on my knees in a dark angle between the dyke and the western jetty, whence I had a strategic survey of the basin; but I was driven at times to relieve inaction by sallies which increased in audacity, I scouted on the road beyond the bridge, hovered round the lock, and peered in at the inn parlour; but nowhere could I see a trace of Grimm. I examined every floating object in the harbour (they were very few), dropped on to two lighters and pried under tarpaulins, boarded a deserted tug and two or three clumsy rowboats tied up to a mooring-post. Only one of these had the look of readiness, the rest being devoid of oars and rowlocks; a discouraging state of things for a prospective boat-lifter. It was the sight of these rowboats that suggested a last and most distracting possibility, namely, that the boat in waiting, if boat there were, might be not in the harbour at all, but somewhere on the sands outside the dyke, where, at this high state of the tide, it would have water and to spare. Back to the dyke then; but as I peered seaward on the way, contingencies evaporated and a solid fact supervened, for I saw the

lights of a steamboat approaching the harbour mouth. I had barely time to gain my coign of vantage before she had swept in between the piers, and with a fitful swizzling of her screw was turning and backing down to a berth just ahead of one of the lighters, and not fifty feet from my hiding-place. A deck-hand jumped ashore with a rope, while the man at the wheel gave gruff directions. The vessel was a small tug, and the man at the wheel disclosed his identity when, having rung off his engines, he jumped ashore also, looked at his watch in the beam of the side-light, and walked towards the village. It was Grimm, by the height and build—Grimm clad in a long tarpaulin coat and a sou'-wester. I watched him cross the shaft of light from the inn window and disappear in the direction of the canal.

Another sailor now appeared and helped his fellow to tie up the tug. The two together then went aft and began to set about some job whose nature I could not determine. To emerge was perilous, so I set about a job of my own, tearing open my bundle and pulling an oilskin jacket and trousers over my clothes, and discarding my peaked cap for a sou'-wester. This operation was prompted instantaneously by the garb of two sailors, who in hauling on the forward warp came into the field of the mast-head light.

It was something of a gymnastic masterpiece, since I was lying—or, rather, standing aslant—on the rough sea-wall, with crannies of brick for foothold and the water plashing below me; but then I had not lived in the *Dulcibella* for nothing. My chain of thought, I fancy, was this—the tug is to carry my party; I cannot shadow a tug in a rowboat, yet I intend to shadow my party; I must therefore go with them in the tug, and the first and soundest step is to mimic her crew. But the next step was a hard matter, for the crew having finished their job sat side by side on the bulwarks and lit their pipes. However, a little pantomime soon occurred, as amusing as it was inspiriting. They seemed to consult together, looking from the tug to the inn and from the inn to the tug. One of them walked a few paces inwards and beckoned to the other, who in his turn called something down the engine-room skylight, and then joined his mate in a scuttle to the inn. Even while I watched the pantomime I was sliding off my boots, and it had not been consummated a second before I had them in my arms and was tripping over the mud in my stocking feet. A dozen noiseless steps and I was over the bulwarks between the wheel and the smoke-stack, casting about for a hiding-place. The conventional stowaway hides in the hold, but there was only a stokehold here, occupied moreover; nor was there an empty apple-barrel, such as Jim of "Treasure Island" found so useful. As far as I could see—and I dared not venture far for fear of the skylight—the surface of the deck offered nothing secure. But on the farther or starboard side, rather abaft the beam, there was a small boat in davits, swung outboard, to which common sense, and perhaps a vague prescience of its after utility, pointed irresistibly. In any case, discrimination was out of place, so I mounted the bulwark and gently entered my refuge. The tackles creaked a trifle, oars and seats impeded me; but well before the thirsty truants had returned I was settled on the floor boards between two thwarts, so placed that I could, if necessary, peep over the gunwale.

The two sailors returned at a run, and very soon after voices approached, and I recognised that of Herr Schenkel chattering volubly. He and Grimm boarded the tug and went down a companion-way aft, near which, as I peeped over, I saw a second skylight, no bigger than the *Dulcibella's*, illuminated from below. Then I heard a cork drawn, and the kiss of glasses, and in a minute or two they re-emerged. It was apparent that Herr Schenkel was inclined to stay and make merry, and that Grimm was anxious to get rid of him, and none too courteous in showing it. The former urged that to-morrow's tide would do; the latter gave orders to cast off, and at length observed with an angry oath that the water was falling, and he must start; and, to clinch matters, with a curt good-night, he went to the wheel and rang up his engines. Herr Schenkel landed and strutted off in high dudgeon,

while the tug's screw began to revolve. We had only glided a few yards on when the engines stopped, a short blast of the whistle sounded, and, before I had had time to recast the future, I heard a scurry of footsteps from the direction of the dyke, first on the bank, next on the deck. The last of these new arrivals panted audibly as he got aboard and dropped on the planks with an unelastic thud.

Her complement made up, the tug left the harbour, but not alone. While slowly gathering way the hull checked all at once with a sharp jerk, recovered, and increased its speed. We had something in tow—what? The lighter, of course, that had been lying astern of us.

Now I knew what was in that lighter, because I had been to see, half an hour ago. It was no lethal cargo, but coal, common household coal; not a full load of it, I remembered—just a good-sized mound amidships, trimmed with battens fore and aft to prevent shifting. "Well," thought I, "this is intelligible enough. Grimm was ostensibly there to call for a load of coal for Memmert. But does that mean we are going to Memmert?" At the same time I recalled a phrase overheard at the depôt, "Only one—half a load." Why half a load?

For some few minutes there was a good deal of movement on deck, and of orders shouted by Grimm and answered by a voice from far astern on the lighter. Presently, however, the tug warmed to her work, the hull vibrated with energy, and an ordered peace reigned on board. I also realised that having issued from the boomed channel we had turned westward, for the wind, which had been blowing us fair, now blew strongly over the port beam.

I peeped out of my eyrie and was satisfied in a moment that as long as I made no noise, and observed proper prudence, I was perfectly safe *until the boat was wanted*. There were no deck lamps; the two skylights diffused but a sickly radiance, and I was abaft the side-lights. I was abaft the wheel also, though thrillingly near it in point of distance—about twelve feet, I should say; and Grimm was steering. The wheel, I should mention here, was raised, as you often see them, on a sort of pulpit, approached by two or three steps and fenced by a breast-high arc of boarding. Only one of the crew was visible, and he was acting as look-out in the extreme bows, the rays of the masthead lights—for a second had been hoisted in sign of towage—glistening on his oilskin back. The other man, I concluded, was steering the lighter, which I could dimly locate by the pale foam at her bow.

And the passengers? They were all together aft, three of them, leaning over the taffrail, with their backs turned to me. One was short and stout—Böhme unquestionably; the panting and the thud on the planks had prepared me for that, though where he had sprung from I did not know. Two were tall, and one of these must be von Brüning. There ought to be four, I reckoned; but three were all I could see. And what of the third? It must be he who "insists on coming," the unknown superior at whose instance and for whose behoof this secret expedition had been planned. And who could he be? Many times, needless to say, I had asked myself that question, but never till now, when I had found the rendezvous and joined the expedition, did it become one of burning import.

"Any weather" was another of those stored-up phrases that were *apropos*. It was a dirty, squally night, not very cold, for the wind still hung in the S.S.W.—an off-shore wind on this coast, causing no appreciable sea on the shoal spaces we were traversing. In the matter of our bearings, I set myself doggedly to overcome that paralysing perplexity, always induced in me by night or fog in these intricate waters; and, by screwing round and round, succeeded so far as to discover and identify two flashing lights—one alternately red and white, far and faint astern; the other right ahead and rather stronger, giving white flashes only. The first and least familiar was, I made out, from the lighthouse on Wangeroog; the second, well known to me as our beacon star in the race from Memmert, was the light on the centre of Norderney Island, about ten miles away.

I had no accurate idea of the time, for I could not see my watch, but I thought we must have started about

a quarter-past eleven. We were travelling fast, the funnel belching out smoke and the bow-wave curling high; for the tug appeared to be a powerful little craft, and her load was comparatively light.

So much for the general situation. As for my own predicament, I was in no mood to brood on the hazards of this mad adventure, a hundredfold more hazardous than my fog-smothered eaves-dropping at Memmert. The crisis, I knew, had come, and the reckless impudence that had brought me here must serve me still and extricate me. Fortune loves rough wooing. I backed my luck and watched.

The behaviour of the passengers struck me as odd. They remained in a row at the taffrail, gazing astern like regretful emigrants, and sometimes gesticulating and pointing. Now no vestige of the low land was visible, so I was driven to the conclusion that it was the lighter they were discussing; and I date my awakening from the moment that I realised this. But the thread broke prematurely; for the passengers took to pacing the deck, and I had to lie low. When next I was able to raise my head they were round Grimm at the wheel, engaged, as far as I could discover from their gestures, in an argument about our course and the time, for Grimm looked at his watch by the light of a hand-lantern.

We were heading north, and I knew by the swell that we must be near the Accumer Ee, the gap between Langeoog and Baltrum. Were we going out to open sea? It came over me with a rush that we *must*, if we were to drop this lighter at Memmert. Had I been Davies I should have been quicker to seize certain rigid conditions of this cruise, which no human power could modify. We had left after high tide. The water therefore was falling everywhere; and the tributary channels in rear of the islands were slowly growing impassable. It was quite thirty miles to Memmert, with three watersheds to pass; behind Baltrum, Norderney, and Juist. A skipper with nerve and perfect confidence might take us over one of these in the dark, but most of the run would infallibly have to be made outside. I now better understood the protests of Herr Schenkel to Grimm. Never once had we seen a lighter in tow in the open sea, though plenty behind the barrier of islands; indeed it was the very existence of the sheltered byways that created such traffic as there was. It was only Grimm's *métier* and the incubus of the lighter that had suggested Memmert as our destination at all, and I began to doubt it now. That tricky hoop of sand had befooled us before.

At this moment, and as if to corroborate my thought, the telegraph rang and the tug slowed down. I effaced myself and heard Grimm shouting to the man on the lighter to starboard his helm, and to the look-out to come aft. The next order froze my very marrow; it was "lower away." Someone was at the davits of my boat fingering the tackles; the forward fall-rope actually slipped in the block and tilted the boat a fraction. I was just wondering how far it was to swim to Langeoog, when a strong, imperious voice (unknown to me) rang out, "No, no! We don't want the boat. The swell's nothing; we can jump! Can't we, Böhme?" The speaker ended with a jovial laugh. "Mercy!" thought I, "are *they* going to swim to Langeoog?" but I also gasped for relief. The tug rolled lifelessly in the swell for a little, and footsteps retreated aft. There were cries of "Achtung!" and some laughter, one big bump and a good deal of grinding; and on we moved again, taking the strain of the tow-rope gingerly, and then full-speed ahead. The passengers, it seemed, preferred the lighter to the tug for cruising in; coal-dust and exposure to clean planks and a warm cuddy. When silence reigned again I peeped out. Grimm was at the wheel still, impassively twirling the spokes, without a glance over his shoulder at his precious freight. And, after all, we *were* going outside.

Close on the port hand lay a black foam-girt shape, the east spit of Baltrum. It fused with the night, while we swung slowly round to windward over the troubled bar. Now we were in the spacious deeps of the North Sea; and feeling it too in increase of swell and volleys of spray.

At this point evolutions began. Grimm gave the wheel up to the

look-out, and himself went to the taffrail, whence he roared back orders of "Port!" or "Starboard!" in response to signals from the lighter. We made one complete circle, steering on each point of the wind in succession, after that worked straight out to sea till the water was a good deal rougher, and back again at a tangent, till in earshot of the surf on the island beach. There the manœuvres, which were clearly in the nature of a trial trip, ended; and we hove to, to tranship our passengers. They, when they came aboard, went straight below, and Grimm, having steadied the tug on a settled course and entrusted the wheel to the sailor again, stripped off his dripping oilskin coat, threw it down on the cabin skylight, and followed them. The course he had set was about west, with Norderney light a couple of points off the port bow. The course for Memmert? Possibly; but I cared not, for my mind was far from Memmert to-night. *It was the course for England too.* Yes, I understood at last. I was assisting at an experimental rehearsal of a great scene, to be enacted, perhaps, in the near future—a scene when multitudes of sea-going lighters, carrying full loads of soldiers, not half-loads of coal, should issue simultaneously, in seven ordered fleets, from seven shallow outlets, and, under escort of the Imperial Navy, traverse the North Sea and throw themselves bodily upon English shores.

Indulgent reader, you may be pleased to say that I have been very obtuse; and yet, with humility, I protest against that verdict. Remember that, recent as are the events I am describing, it is only since they happened that the possibility of an invasion of England by Germany has become a topic of public discussion. Davies and I had never—I was going to say had never considered it; but that would not be accurate, for we had glanced at it once or twice; and if any single incident in his or our joint cruise had provided a semblance of confirmation, he, at any rate, would have kindled to that spark. But you will see how perversely from first to last circumstances drove us deeper and deeper into the wrong groove, till the idea became inveterate that the secret we were seeking was one of defence and not offence. Hence a complete mental somersault was required, and, as an amateur, I found it difficult; the more so that the method of invasion, as I darkly comprehended it now, was of such a strange and unprecedented character; for orthodox invasions start from big ports and involve a fleet of ocean transports, while none of our clues pointed that way. To neglect obvious methods, to draw on the obscure resources of an obscure strip of coast, to improve and exploit a quantity of insignificant streams and tidal outlets, and thence, screened by the islands, to despatch an armada of light-draught barges, capable of flinging themselves on a correspondingly obscure and therefore unexpected portion of the enemy's coast; that was a conception so daring, aye, and so quixotic in some of its aspects, that even now I was half incredulous. Yet it must be the true one. Bit by bit the fragments of the puzzle fell into order till a coherent whole was adumbrated.*

The tug surged on into the night; a squall of rain leapt upon us and swept hissing astern. Baltrum vanished, and the strands of Norderney beamed under transient moonlight. Drunk with triumph, I cuddled in my rocking cradle and ransacked every unvisited chamber of the memory, tossing out their dusty contents, to make a joyous bonfire of some, and to see the residue take life and meaning in the light of the great revelation.

My reverie was of things, not persons; of vast national issues rather than of the poignant human interests so closely linked with them. But on a sudden I was recalled, with a shock, to myself, Davies, and the present.

We were changing our course, as I knew by variations in the whirl of draughts which whistled about me. I heard Grimm afoot again, and, choosing my moment, surveyed the scene. Broad on the port-beam were the garish lights of Norderney town and promenade, and the tug, I perceived, was drawing in to enter the See-Gat.† Round she came,

* The reader will find the whole matter dealt with in the Epilogue.

† See Chart B.

hustling through the broken water of the bar, till her nose was south and the wind was on the starboard bow. Not a mile from me were the villa and the yacht, and the three persons of the drama—three, that is, if Davies were safe.

Were we to land at Norderney harbour? Heavens, what a magnificent climax!—if only I could rise to it. My work here was done. At a stroke to rejoin Davies and be free to consummate our designs!

A desperate idea of cutting the davit-tackles—I blush to think of the stupidity—was rejected as soon as it was born, and instead, I endeavoured to imagine our approach to the pier. My boat hung on the starboard side; that would be the side away from the quay, and the tide would be low. I could swarm down the davits during the stir of arrival, drop into the sea and swim the few yards across the dredged-out channel, wade through the mud to within a short distance of the *Dulcibella*, and swim the rest. I rubbed the salt out of my eyes and wriggled my cramped legs. . . . Hullo! why was Grimm leaving the helm again? Back he went to the cabin, leaving the sailor at the helm. . . . We ought to be turning to port now; but no—on we went, south, for the mainland.

Though one plan was frustrated, the longing to get to Davies, once implanted, waxed apace.

Our destination was at last beyond dispute.* The channel we were in was the same that we had cut across on our blind voyage to Memmert, and the same my ferry-steamer had followed two days ago. It was a *cul-de-sac* leading to one place only, the landing stage at Norddeich. The only place on the whole coast, now I came to think of it, where the tug could land at this tide. There the quay would be on the starboard side, and I saw myself tied to my eyrie while the passengers landed and the tug and lighter turned back for Memmert; at Memmert, dawn, and discovery.

There was some way out—some way out, I repeated to myself; some way to reap the fruit of Davies's long tutelage in the lore of this strange region. What would *he* do?

For answer there came the familiar *frou-frou* of gentle surf on drying sands. The swell was dying away, the channel narrowing; dusky and weird on the starboard hand stretched leagues of new-risen sand. Two men only were on deck; the moon was quenched under the vanguard clouds of a fresh squall.

A madcap scheme danced before me. The time, I *must* know the time! Crouching low and cloaking the flame with my jacket I struck a match; 2.30 a.m.—the tide had been ebbing for about three hours and a half. Low water about five; they would be aground till 7.30. Danger to life? None. Flares and rescuers? Not likely, with "him who insists" on board; besides, no one could come, there being no danger. I should have a fair wind and a fair tide for *my* trip. Grimm's coat was on the skylight; we were both clean shaved.

The helmsman gazed ahead, intent on his difficult course, and the wind howled to perfection. I knelt up and examined one of the davit-tackles. There was nothing remarkable about it, a double and a single block (like our own peak halyards), the lower one hooked into a ring in the boat, the hauling part made fast to a cleat on the davit itself. Something there must be to give lateral support or the boat would have racketed abroad in the roll outside. The support, I found, consisted of two lanyards spliced to the davits and rove through holes in the keel. These I leaned over and cut with my pocket-knife; the result being a barely perceptible swaying of the boat, for the tug was under the lee of sands and on an even keel. Then I left my hiding-place, climbing out of the stern sheets by the after-davit, and preparing every successive motion with exquisite tenderness, till I stood on the deck. In another moment I was at the cabin skylight, lifting Grimm's long oilskin coat. (A second's yielding to temptation here; but no, the skylight was ground glass, fastened from below. So, on with the coat, up with the collar, and forward to the wheel on tiptoe.) As soon as I was up to the engine-room skylight (that is to say, well ahead of

* See Chart.

the cabin roof). I assumed a natural step, went up to the pulpit and touched the helmsman on the arm, as I had seen Grimm do. The man stepped aside, grunting something about a light, and I took the wheel from him. Grimm was a man of few words, so I just jogged his satellite, and pointed forward. He went off like a lamb to his customary place in the bows, not having dreamt —why should he?—of examining me, but in him I had instantly recognised one of the crew of the *Kormoran*.

My ruse developed in all its delicious simplicity. We were, I estimated, about half-way to Norddeich, in the Buse Tief, a channel of a navigable breadth, at the utmost of two hundred yards at this period of the tide. Two faint lights, one above the other, twinkled far ahead. What they meant I neither knew not cared, since the only use I put them to was to test the effect of the wheel, for this was the first time I had ever tasted the sweets of command on a steamboat. A few cautious essays taught me the rudiments, and nothing could hinder the catastrophe now.

I edged over to starboard—that was the side I had selected—and again a little more, till the glistening back of the look-out gave a slight movement; but he was a well-drilled minion, with implicit trust in the "old man." Now, hard over! and spoke by spoke I gave her the full pressure of the helm. The look-out shouted a warning, and I raised my arm in calm acknowledgment. A cry came from the lighter, and I remember I was just thinking "What the dickens'll happen to her?" when the end came; a *euthanasia* so mild and gradual (for the sands are fringed with mud) that the disaster was on us before I was aware of it. There was just the tiniest premonitory shuddering as our keel clove the buttery medium, a cascade of ripples from either beam, and the wheel jammed to rigidity in my hands, as the tug nestled up to her resting-place.

In the scene of panic that followed, it is safe to say that I was the only soul on board who acted with methodical tranquillity. The look-out flew astern like an arrow, bawling to the lighter. Grimm, with the passengers tumbling up after him, was on deck in an instant, storming and cursing; flung himself on the wheel which I had respectfully abandoned, jangled the telegraph, and wrenched at the spokes. The tug listed over under the force of the tide; wind, darkness, and rain aggravated the confusion.

For my part, I stepped back behind the smoke stack, threw off my robe of office, and made for the boat. Long and bitter experience of running aground had told me that that was sure to be wanted. On the way I cannoned into one of the passengers and pressed him into my service; incidentally seeing his face, and verifying an old conjecture. It was one who, in Germany, has a better right to insist than anyone else.

As we reached the davits there was a report like a pistol-shot from the port-side—the tow-rope parting, I believe, as the lighter with her shallower draught swung on past the tug. Fresh tumult arose, in which I heard: "Lower the boat," from Grimm; but the order was already executed. My ally the Passenger and I had each cast off a tackle, and slacked away with a run; that done, I promptly clutched the wire guy to steady myself, and tumbled in. (It was not far to tumble, for the tug listed heavily to starboard; think of our course, and the set of the ebb stream, and you will see why.) The forward fall unhooked sweetly; but the after one lost play. "Slack away," I called, peremptorily, and felt for my knife. My helper above obeyed; the hook yielded; I filliped away the loose tackle, and the boat floated away.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

WE ACHIEVE OUR DOUBLE AIM

When, exactly, the atmosphere of misunderstanding on the stranded tug was dissipated, I do not know, for by the time I had fitted the rowlocks and shipped sculls, tide and wind had caught me, and were sweeping me

merrily back on the road to Norderney, whose lights twinkled through the scud in the north. With my first few strokes I made towards the lighter—which I could see sagging helplessly to leeward—but as soon as I thought I was out of sight of the tug, I pulled round and worked out my own salvation. There was an outburst of shouting which soon died away. Full speed on a falling tide! They were pinned there for five hours sure. It was impossible to miss the way, and with my stout allies heaving me forward, I made short work of the two-mile passage. There was a sharp tussle at the last, where the Riff-Gat poured its stream across my path, and then I was craning over my shoulder, God knows with what tense anxiety, for the low hull and taper mast of the *Dulcibella*. Not there! No, not where I had left her. I pulled furiously up the harbour past a sleeping ferry-steamer and—praise Heaven!—came on her warped alongside the jetty.

"Who's that?" came from below, as I stepped on board.

"Hush! it's me." And Davies and I were pawing one another in the dark of the cabin.

"Are you all right, old chap?" said he.

"Yes; are you? A match! What's the time? Quick!"

"Good Heavens, Carruthers, what the blazes have you done to yourself?" (I suspect I cut a pretty figure after my two days' outing.)

"Ten past three. It's the invasion of England! Is Dollmann at the villa?"

"Invasion?"

"Is Dollmann at the villa?"

"Yes."

"Is the *Medusa* afloat?"

"No, on the mud."

"The devil! Are *we* afloat?"

"I think so still, but they made me shift."

"Think! Track her out! Pole her out! Cut those warps!"

For a few strenuous minutes we toiled at the sweeps, till the *Dulcibella* was berthed ahead of the steamer, in deeper water. Meanwhile I had whispered a few facts.

"How soon can you get under way?" I asked.

"Ten minutes."

"When's daylight?"

"Sunrise about seven, first dawn about five. Where are we bound?"

"Holland, or England."

"Are they invading it now?" said Davies, calmly.

"No, only rehearsing!" I laughed, wildly.

"Then we can wait."

"We can wait exactly an hour and a half. Come ashore and knock up Dollmann; we must denounce him, and get them both aboard; it's now or never. Holy Saints! man, not as you are!" (He was in pyjamas.) "Sea clothes!"

While he put on Christian attire, I resumed my facts and sketched a plan.

"Are you watched?" I asked.

"I think so; by the *Kormoran's* men."

"Is the *Kormoran* here?"

"Yes."

"The men?"

"Not to-night. Grimm called for them in that tug. I was watching. And, Carruthers, the *Blitz* is here."

"Where?"

"In the roads outside—didn't you see her?"

"Wasn't looking. Her skipper's safe anyway; so's Böhme, so's the Tertium Quid, and so are the *Kormoran's* men. The coast's clear—it's now or never."

Once more we were traversing the long jetty and the silent streets, rain driving at our backs. We trod on air, I think; I remember no fatigue. Davies sometimes broke into a little run, muttering "scoundrel" to himself.

"I was right—only upside down," he murmured more than once. "Always really right—those channels are the key to the whole concern. Chatham, our only eastern base—no North Sea base or squadron—they'd land at one of those God-forsaken flats off the Crouch and Blackwater."

"It seems a wild scheme," I observed.

"Wild? In a way. So is *any* invasion. But it's thorough; it's German. No other country could do it. It's all dawning on me—by Jove! It will be at the *Wash*—much the nearest, and as sandy as this side."

"How's Dollmann been?" I asked.

"Polite, but queer and jumpy. It's too long a story."

"Clara?"

"*She's* all right. By Jove! Carruthers—never mind."

We found a night-bell at the villa door and rang it lustily. A window aloft opened, and "A message from Commander von Brüning—urgent," I called up.

The window shut, and soon after the hall was lighted and the door opened by Dollmann in a dressing-gown.

"Good morning, Lieutenant X——," I said, in English. "Stop, we're friends, you fool!" as the door was flung nearly to. It opened very slowly again, and we walked in.

"Silence!" he hissed. The sweat stood on his steep forehead and a hectic flush on either cheek, but there was a smile—what a smile!—on his lips. Motioning us to tread noiselessly a vain ideal for me), he led the way to the sitting-room we knew, switched on the light, and faced us.

"Well?" he said, in English, still smiling.

I consulted my watch, and I may say that if my hand was an index to my general appearance, I must have looked the most abject ruffian under heaven.

"We probably understand one another," I said, "and to explain is to lose time. We sail for Holland, or perhaps England, at five at the latest, and we want the pleasure of your company. We promise you immunity—on certain conditions, which can wait. We have only two berths, so that we can only accommodate Miss Clara besides yourself." He smiled on through this terse harangue, but the smile froze, as though beneath it raged some crucial debate. Suddenly he laughed (a low, ironical laugh).

"You fools," he said, "you confounded meddlesome young idiots; I thought I had done with you. Promise me immunity? Give me till five? By God, I'll give you five minutes to be off to England and be damned to you, or else to be locked up for spies! What the devil do you take me for?"

"A traitor in German service," said Davies, none too firmly. We were both taken back by this slashing attack.

"A tr——? You pig-headed young marplots! I'm in *British* service! You're wrecking the work of years—and on the very threshold of success."

For an instant Davies and I looked at one another in stupefaction. He lied—I could swear he lied; but how make sure?

"Why did you try to wreck Davies?" said I, mechanically.

"Pshaw! They made me clear him out. I knew he was safe, and safe he is."

There was only one thing for it—a last finesse, to put him to the proof.

"Very well," I said, after a moment or two, "we'll clear out—silence, Davies!—as it appears we have acted in error; but it's right to tell you that we know everything."

"Not so loud, curse you! What do you know?"

"I was taking notes at Memmert the other night."

"Impossible!"

"Thanks to Davies. Under difficulties, of course, but I heard quite enough. You were reporting your English tour—Chatham, you know, and the English scheme of attack, a mythical one, no doubt, as you're on the right side! Böhme and the rest were dealing with the German scheme of defence. A to G—I heard it all—the seven islands and the seven channels between them (Davies knows every one of them by heart); and then on land, the ring of railway, Esens the centre, the army corps to mobilise and entrench—all nugatory, wasted, ha! ha!—as you're on the right s——"

"Not so loud, you fiend of mischief!" He turned his back, and made an irresolute pace or two towards the door, his hands kneading the folds of his dressing-gown as they had kneaded the curtain at Memmert. Twice he began a question and twice broke off.

"I congratulate you, gentlemen," he said, finally, and with more composure, facing us again, "you have done marvels in your misplaced zeal; but you have compromised me too much already. I shall have to have you arrested—purely for form's sake——"

"Thank you," I broke in. "We have wasted five minutes, and time presses. We sail at five, and—purely for form's sake—would rather have you with us."

"What do you mean?" he snarled,

"I had the advantage of *you* at Memmert, in spite of acoustic obstacles. Your friends made an appointment behind your back, and I, in my misplaced zeal, have taken some trouble to attend it; so that I've had a working demonstration on another matter, the invasion of England from the seven *siels*." (Davies nudged me.) "No, I should let that pistol alone; and no, I wouldn't ring the bell. You can arrest us if you like, but the secret's in safe hands."

"You lie!" He was right there; but he could not know it.

"Do you suppose I haven't taken that precaution? But no names are mentioned." He gave a sort of groan, sank into a chair, and seemed to age and grizzle before our very eyes.

"What did you say about immunity, and Clara?" he muttered.

"We're friends—we're friends!" burst out Davies, with a gulp in his voice. "We want to help you both." (Through a sudden mist that filmed my eyes I saw him impetuously walk over and lay his hand on the other's shoulder.) "Those chaps are on our track and yours. Come with us. Wake her, tell her. It'll be too late soon."

X—— shrank from his touch. "Tell her? I can't tell her. You tell her, boy." He was huddling back into his chair. Davies turned to me.

"Where's her room?" I said, sharply.

"Above this one."

"Go up, Carruthers," said Davies.

"Not I—I shall frighten her into a fit."

"I don't like to."

"Nonsense, man! We'll both go then."

"Don't make a noise," said a dazed voice. We left that huddled figure and stole upstairs—thickly carpeted stairs, luckily. The door we wanted was half open, and the room behind it lighted. On the threshold stood a slim white figure, bare-footed, bare-throated.

"What is it, father?" she called in a whisper. "Whom have you been talking to?" I pushed Davies forward, but he hung back.

"Hush, don't be frightened," I said, "it's I, Carruthers, and Davies—and Davies. May we come in, just for one moment?"

I gently widened the opening of th door, while she stepped back and pu one hand to her throat.

"Please come to your father," I said "We are going to take you both to Eng land in the *Dulcibella*—now, at once."

She had heard me, but her eye wandered to Davies.

"I understand not," she faltered trembling and cowering in such touch ing bewilderment that I could not bea to look at her.

"For God's sake, say something Davies," I muttered.

"Clara!" said Davies, "will yo not trust us?"

I heard a little gasp from her. Ther was a flutter of lace and cambric an she was in his arms, sobbing like tired child, her little white feet betwee his great clumsy sea-boots—her rose brown cheek on his rough jersey.

"It's past four, old chap," I re marked, brutally. "I'm going dow to him again. No packing to speal of, mind. They must be out of thi in half an hour." I stumbled awk wardly on the stairs (again that tire some film!), and found him stuffin some papers pell-mell into the stove There were only slumbering embers i it, but he did not seem to notic that. "You must be dressed in ha an hour," I said, furtively pocketin a pistol which lay on the table.

"Have you told her? Take her t England; you two boys. I think I' stay." He sank into a chair again.

"Nonsense, she won't go withou you. You must, for her sake—in ha an hour, too."

I prefer to pass that half-hou lightly over. Davies left before me t prepare the yacht for sea, and I ha to bear the brunt of what followed including (as a mere episode) a scen with the step-mother, the memory o which rankles in me yet. After al she was a sensible woman.

As for the other two, the girl when saw her next, in her short boating skir and Tam-o'-shanter, was a miracle o coolness and pluck. But for her should never have got him away. And ah! how good it was to be out in th wholesome rain again, hurrying to th harbour with my two charges, hurryin

em down the greasy ladder to that ail atom of English soil, their first erdon of home and safety.

Our flight from the harbour was unolested, unnoticed. Only the first nastly evidences of dawn were mingng with the strangled moonlight, as e tacked round the pier-head and eaded close-reefed down the Riff-Gat n the lees of the ebb-tide. We had to ass under the very quarter of the *litz*, so Davies said; for, of course, he one was on deck till we reached the pen sea. Day was breaking then. It as dead low water, and, far away to ie south, between dun swathes of sand, thought I saw—but probably it was nly a fancy — two black stranded pecks. Rail awash, and decks streamg, we took the outer swell and clawed ose-hauled under the lee of Juist, estward, hurrying westward.

"Up the Ems on the flood, and to utch Delfzyl," I urged. No, thought avies; it was too near Germany, and ere was a tidal cut through from use Tief. Better to dodge in behind ottum Island. So on we pressed, past lemmert, over the Juister Reef and ie *Corinne's* buried millions, across the vo broad and yeasty mouths of the ms, till Rottum, a wee lonesome wafer an islet, the first of the Dutch archielago, was close on the weather-bow.

"We must get in behind that," said avies, "then we shall be safe; I think know the way, but get the next chart; nd then take a rest, old chap. Clara nd I can manage." (She had been on eck most of the time, as capable a and as you could wish for, better far han I in my present state of exaustion.) I crawled along the slippery oping planks and went below.

"Where are we?" cried Dollmann, arting up from the lee sofa, where he eemed to have been lying in a sort of rance. A book, his own book, slipped om his knees, and I saw the frontisiece lying on the floor in a pool of oil; or the stove had gone adrift, and the aloon was in a wretched state of qualor and litter.

"Off Rottum," I said, and knelt up o find the chart. There was a look in is eyes that I suppose I ought to have nderstood, but I can scarcely blame myself, for the accumulated strain, not only of the last three days and nights, but of the whole arduous month of my cruise with Davies, was beginning to tell on me, now that safety and success were at hand. I handed up the chart through the companion, and then crept into the reeling fo'c'sle and lay down on the spare sail-bags, with the thunder and thump of the seas around and above me.

I must quote Davies for the event that happened now; for by the time I had responded to the alarm and climbed up through the fore-hatch, the whole tragedy was over and done with.

"X—— came up the companion," he says, "soon after you went down. He held on by the runner, and stared to windward at Rottum, as though he knew the place quite well. And then he came towards us, moving so unsteadily that I gave Clara the tiller, and went to help him. I tried to make him go down again, but he wouldn't, and came aft.

"'Give me the helm,' he said, half to himself. 'Sea's too bad outside—there's a short cut here.'

"'Thanks,' I said, 'I know this one.' (I don't think I meant to be sarcastic.) He said nothing, and settled himself on the counter behind us, safe enough, with his feet against the lee-rail, and then, to my astonishment, began to talk over my shoulder jolly sensibly about the course, pointing out a buoy which is wrong on the chart (as I knew), and telling me it was wrong, and so on. Well, we came to the bar of the Schild, and had to turn south for that twisty bit of beating between Rottum and Bosch Flat. Clara was at the jib-sheet, I had the chart and the tiller (you know how absent I get like that); there was a bobble of sea, and we both had heaps to do, and—well—I happened to look round, and he was gone. He hadn't spoken for a minute or two, but I believe the last thing I heard him say (I was hardly attending at the time, for we were in the thick of it) was something about a 'short cut' again. He must have slipped over quietly . . . He had an ulster and big boots on."

We cruised about for a time, but never found him.

That evening, after threading the maze of shoals between the Dutch

ainland and islands, we anchored off e little hamlet of Ostmahorn,* gave e yacht in charge of some astonished hermen, and thence by road and rail, rrying still, gained Harlingen, and took passage on a steamer to London. From that point our personal history is of no concern to the outside world, and here, therefore, I bring this narrative to an end.

EPILOGUE †

BY THE EDITOR

An interesting document, somewhat amaged by fire, lies on my study table. It is a copy (in cipher) of a confidential memorandum to the German Government embodying a scheme for he invasion of England by Germany. t is unsigned, but internal evidence, nd the fact that it was taken by Mr. 'Carruthers" from the stove of the illa at Norderney, leave no doubt as o its authorship. For many reasons it is ut of the question to print the textual ranslation of it, as deciphered; but I propose to give an outline of its contents.

Even this must strain discretion to ts uttermost limits, and had I only to consider the instructed few who follow he trend of professional opinion on such subjects, I should leave the foregoing narrative to speak for itself. But, as was stated in the preface, our primary purpose is to reach everyone; and there may be many who, in spite of able and authoritative warnings frequently uttered since these events occurred, are still prone to treat the German danger as an idle "bogey," and may be disposed, in this case, to imagine that a baseless romance has been foisted on them.

A few persons (English as well as German) hold that Germany is strong enough now to meet us single-handed, and throw an army on our shores. The memorandum rejects this view, deferring isolated action for at least a decade; and supposing, for present purposes, a coalition of three Powers against Great Britain. And subsequent researches through the usual channels place it beyond dispute that this condition was relied on by the German Government in adopting the scheme. They realised that even if, owing to our widely scattered forces, they gained that temporary command of the North Sea which would be essential for a successful landing, they would inevitably lose it when our standing fleets were concentrated and our reserve ships mobilised. With its sea-communications cut, the prospects of the invading army would be too dubious. I state it in that mild way, for it seems not to have been held that failure was absolutely certain; and rightly, I think, in spite of the dogmas of the strategists—for the case transcends all experience. No man can calculate the effect on our delicate economic fabric of a well-timed, well-planned blow at the industrial heart of the kingdom, the great northern and midland towns, with their teeming populations of peaceful wage-earners. In this instance, however, joint action (the occasion for which is perhaps not difficult to guess) was distinctly contemplated, and Germany's *rôle* in the coalition was exclusively that of invader. Her fleet was to be kept intact, and she herself to remain ostensibly neutral until the first shock was over, and our own battle-fleets either beaten, or, the much more likely event, so crippled by a hard-won victory as to be incapable of withstanding compact and unscathed forces. Then, holding the balance of power, she would strike. And the blow? It was not till I read this memorandum that I grasped the full merits of that daring scheme, under which every advantage, moral, material, and geographical, possessed by Germany, is utilised to the utmost, and every disadvantage of our own turned to account against us.

Two root principles pervade it: perfect organisation; perfect secrecy. Under the first head come some general considerations. The writer (who is

* See Map A.

† For this chapter see Map A.

intimately conversant with conditions on both sides of the North Sea) argued that Germany is pre-eminently fitted to undertake an invasion of Great Britain. She has a great army (a mere fraction of which would suffice) in a state of high efficiency, but a useless weapon, as against us, unless transported over seas. She has a peculiar genius for organisation, not only in elaborating minute detail, but in the grasp of a coherent whole. She knows the art of giving a brain to a machine, of transmitting power to the uttermost cog-wheel, and at the same time of concentrating responsibility in a supreme centre. She has a small navy, but very effective for its purpose, built, trained, and manned on methodical principles, for defined ends, and backed by an inexhaustible reserve of men from her maritime conscription. She studies and practises co-operation between her army and navy. Her hands are free for offence in home waters, since she has no distant network of coveted colonies and dependencies on which to dissipate her defensive energies. Finally, she is, compared with ourselves, economically independent, having commercial access through her land frontiers to the whole of Europe. She has little to lose and much to gain.

The writer pauses here to contrast our own situation, and I summarise his points. We have a small army, dispersed over the whole globe, and administered on a gravely defective system. We have no settled theory of national defence, and no competent authority whose business it is to give us one. The matter is still at the stage of civilian controversy. Co-operation between the army and navy is not studied and practised; much less do there exist any plans, worthy of the name, for the repulse of an invasion, or any readiness worth considering for the prompt equipment and direction of our home forces to meet a sudden emergency. We have a great and, in many respects, a magnificent navy, but not great enough for the interests it insures, and with equally defective institutions; not built or manned methodically, having an utterly inadequate reserve of men, all classes of which would be absorbed at the very outset without a vestige of preparation for the enrolment of volunteers; distracted by the multiplicity of its functions in guarding our colossal empire and commerce, and conspicuously lacking a brain, not merely for the smooth control of its own unwieldy mechanism, but for the study of rival aims and systems. We have no North Sea naval base, no North Sea fleet, and no North Sea policy. Lastly, we stand in a highly dangerous economical position.

The writer then deals with the method of invasion, and rejects the obvious one at once, that of sending forth a fleet of transports from one or more of the North Sea ports. He combats especially the idea of making Emden (the nearest to our shores) the port of departure. I mention this because, since his own scheme was adopted, it is instructive to note that Emden has been used (with caution) as a red herring by the inspired German press, when the subject was mentioned at all, and industriously dragged across the trail. His objections to the North Sea ports apply, he remarks, in reality to all schemes of invasion, whether the conditions be favourable or not. One is that secrecy is rendered impossible—and secrecy is vital. The collection of the transports would be known in England weeks before the hour was ripe for striking; for all large ports are cosmopolitan and swarm with potential spies. In Germany's case, moreover, suitable ships are none too plentiful, and the number required would entail a large deduction from her mercantile marine. The other reason concerns the actual landing. This must take place on an open part of the east coast of England. No other objective is even considered. Now the difficulty of transhipping and landing troops by boats from transports anchored in deep water, in a safe, swift, and orderly fashion, on an open beach, is enormous. The most hastily improvised resistance might cause a humiliating disaster. Yet the first stage is the most important of all. It is imperative that the invaders should seize and promptly intrench a pre-arranged line of country, to serve as an initial base. This once done, they can

use other resources; they can bring up transports, land cavalry and heavy guns, pour in stores, and advance. But unless this is done, they are impotent, be their sea-communications never so secure.

The only logical alternative is then propounded: to despatch an army of infantry with the lightest type of field-guns in big sea-going lighters, towed by powerful but shallow-draught tugs, under escort of a powerful composite squadron of warships; and to fling the flotilla, at high tide if possible, straight upon the shore.

Such an expedition could be prepared in absolute secrecy, by turning to account the natural features of the German coast. No great port was to be concerned in any way. All that was required was sufficient depth of water to float the lighters and tugs; and this is supplied by seven insignificant streams, issuing from the Frisian littoral, and already furnished with small harbours and sluice-gates, with one exception, namely, the tidal creek at Norden; for this, it appeared, was one of the chosen seven, and not, as "Carruthers" supposed, Hilgenriedersiel, which, if you remember, he had no time to visit, and which has, in fact, no stream of any value at all, and no harbour. All of these streams would have to be improved, deepened, and generally canalised; ostensibly with a commercial end, for purposes of traffic with the islands, which are growing health resorts during a limited summer season.

The whole expedition would be organised under seven distinct subdivisions—not too great a number in view of its cumbrous character. Seawards, the whole of the coast is veiled by the fringe of islands and the zone of shoals. Landwards, the loop of railway round the Frisian peninsula would form the line of communication in rear of the seven streams. Esens was to be the local centre of administration when the scheme grew to maturity, but not till then. Every detail for the movement of troops under the seven different heads was to be arranged for with secrecy and exactitude many months in advance, and from headquarters at Berlin. It was not expected that nothing would leak out, but care was to be taken that anything that did d so should be attributed to defensiv measures—a standing feature in Ge man mobilisation being the establish ment of a corps of observation alon the Frisian coast; in fact, the sam machinery was to be used, and its cor version for offence concealed up to th latest possible moment. The same pre cautions were to be taken in the pre liminary work on the spot. There, fou men only (it was calculated) need be i full possession of the secret. One wa to represent the Imperial Navy (a pos filled by our friend von Brüning). An other (Böhme) was to superintend th six canals and the construction of th lighters. The functions of the third wer twofold. He was to organise what may call the local labour—that is, th helpers required for embarkation, th crews of the tugs, and, most importan of all, the service of pilots for the navi gation of the seven flotillas throug the corresponding channels to th open sea. He must be a local man thoroughly acquainted with the coas of a social standing not much abov the average of villagers and fishermen and he must be ready when the tim was ripe with lists of the right men fo the right duties, lists to which the con scription authorities could, when re quired, give instant legal effect. His other function was to police the coas for spies, and to report anything sus picious to von Brüning, who woul never be far away. On the whole think that they found the grim Grimm a jewel for their purpose.

As fourth personage, the write designates himself, the promoter of th scheme, the indispensable link betwee the two nations. He undertakes t furnish reliable information as to th disposition of troops in England, as t the hydrography of the coast selecte for the landing, as to the supplies avai able in its vicinity, and the strateg points to be seized. He proposes to b guide-in-chief to the expedition durin transit. And in the meantime (whe not otherwise employed) he was t reside at Norderney, in close touch wit the other three, and controlling th commercial undertakings which wer to throw dust in the eyes of the curiou

emmert, by the way, is not men-ned in this memorandum.] He speaks of the place "selected for e landing," and proceeds to consider s question in detail. I cannot follow n in his review, deeply interesting ough it is, and shall say at once that reduces possible landing-places to o, the flats on the Essex coast tween Foulness and Brightlingsea, d the Wash—with a decided pre-ence for the latter. Assuming that e enemy, if they got wind of an in-sion at all, would expect transports be employed, he chooses the sort of ot which they would be least likely defend, and which, nevertheless, s suitable to the character of the tillas, and similar to the region they rted from. There is such a spot on e Lincolnshire coast, on the north e of the Wash,* known as East lland. It is low-lying land, dyked ainst the sea, and bordered like Frisia h sand-flats which dry off at low ter. It is easy of access from the st, by way of Boston Deeps, a deep-ter channel formed by a detached nk, called the Long Sand, lying rallel to the shore for ten miles. is bank makes a natural break-ter against the swell from the st (the only quarter to be feared); d the Deeps behind it, where there an average depth of thirty-four feet low-water, would form an excellent adstead for the covering squadron, ose guns would command the shore thin easy range. It is noted in passing at this is just the case where German st-class battleships would have an vantage over British ships of the me calibre. The latter are of just too avy a draught to navigate such ters without peril if, indeed, they uld enter this roadstead at all, for ere is a bar at the mouth of it with ly thirty-one feet at high water, ring tides. The former, built as they re with a view to manœuvring in the rth Sea, are just within the margin safety. East Holland is within easy riking distance of the manufacturing stricts, a vigorous raid on which is, e writer urges, the true policy of an vader. He reports positively that there exist (in a proper military sense) no preparations whatever to meet such an attack. East Holland is also the nearest point on the British shores to Germany, excepting the coast of Norfolk; much nearer, indeed, than the Essex flats alluded to, and reached by a simple deep-sea passage, without any dangerous region to navigate, like the mouth of the Channel and the estuary of the Thames from Harwich westwards. The distance is 240 sea-miles, west by south roughly, from Borkum Island, and 280 from Wangeroog. The time estimated for transit after the flotillas had been assembled outside the islands is from thirty to thirty-four hours.

Embarkation is the next topic. This could and must be effected in one tide. At the six *siels* there was a mean period of two and a half hours in every twelve, during which the water was high enough. At Norden a rather longer time was available. But this should be amply sufficient if the machinery were in good working order and were punctually set in motion. High water occurs approximately at the same time at all seven outlets, the difference between the two furthest apart, Carolinensiel and Greetsiel, being only half an hour.

Lastly, the special risks attendant on such an expedition are dispassionately weighed. X——, though keenly anxious to recommend his scheme, writes in no blindly sanguine spirit. There are no modern precedents for any invasion in the least degree comparable to that of England by Germany. Any such attempt will be a hazardous experiment. But he argues that the advantages of his method outweigh the risks, and that most of the risks themselves would attach equally to any other method. Whatever skill in prediction was used, bad weather might overtake the expedition. Yes; but if transports were used transhipment into boats for landing would in bad weather be fraught with the same and a greater peril. But transports could stand off and wait. Delay is fatal in any case; unswerving promptitude is the essence of such an enterprise. The lighters would be in danger of foundering? Beside the point; if the end is worth gaining the risks must be faced,

* See Map A.

Soldiers' lives are sacrificed in tens of thousands on battlefields. The flotilla would be demoralised during transit by the assault of a few torpedo-boats? Granted; but the same would apply to a fleet of transports, with the added certainty that one lucky shot would send to the bottom ten times the number of soldiers, with less hope of rescue. In both cases reliance must be placed on the efficiency and vigilance of the escort. It is admitted, however, in a passage which might well make my two adventurers glow with triumph, that if by any mischance the British discovered what was afoot in good time, and were able to send over a swarm of light-draught boats, which could elude the German warships and get amongst the flotillas while they were still in process of leaving the *siels*; it is admitted that in that case the expedition was doomed. But it is held that such an event was not to be feared. Reckless pluck is abundant in the British Navy, but expert knowledge of the tides and shoals in these waters is utterly lacking. The British charts are of no value, and there is no evidence (he reports) that the subject has been studied in any way by the British Admiralty. Let me remark here, that I believe Mr. "Davies's" views, as expressed in the earlier chapters, when they were still among the great estuaries, are all absolutely sound. The "channel theory," though it only bore indirectly on the grand issue before them, was true, and should be laid to heart, or I should not have wasted space on it.

One word more, in conclusion. There is an axiom, much in fashion now, that there is no fear of an invasion of the British Isles, because, if we lose command of the sea, we can be starved—a cheaper and surer way of reducing us to submission. It is a loose, valueless axiom, but by sheer repetition it is becoming an article of faith. It implies that "command of the sea" is a thing to be won or lost definitively; that we may have it to-day and lose it for ever to-morrow. On the contrary, the chances are that in anything like an even struggle the command of the sea will hang in the balance for an indefinite time. And even against great odds, it would probably be impossible for our enemies so to bar the avenues of our commerce, so to blockade the ports of our extensive coast-line, and so to overcome the interest which neutrals will have in supplying us, as to bring us to our knees in less than two years, during which time we can be recuperating and rebuilding from our unique internal resources, and endeavouring to regain command.

No; the better axiom is that nothing short of a successful invasion could finally compel us to make peace. Our hearts are stout, we hope; but facts are facts; and a successful raid, such as that here sketched, if you will think out its consequences, must appal the stoutest heart. It was checkmated, but others may be conceived. In any case, we know the way in which they look at these things in Germany.

Postscript (*March*, 1903).

It so happens that while this book was in the press a number of measures have been taken by the Government to counteract some of the very weaknesses and dangers which are alluded to above. A Committee of National Defence has been set up, and the welcome given to it was a truly extraordinary comment on the apathy and confusion which it is designed to supplant. A site on the Forth has been selected for a new North Sea naval base—an excellent if tardy decision; for ten years or so must elapse before the existing anchorage becomes in any sense a "base." A North Sea fleet has also been created—another good measure; but it should be remembered that its ships are not modern, or in the least capable of meeting the principal German squadrons under the circumstances supposed above.

Lastly, a Manning Committee has (among other matters) reported vaguely in favour of a Volunteer Reserve. There is no means of knowing what this recommendation will lead to; let us hope not to the fiasco of the last badly conceived experiment. Is it not becoming patent that the time has come for training all Englishmen systematically either for the sea or for the rifle?

THE END.

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HINTS TO HARASSED HOUSEWIVES

POTATO SOUP.—*Ingredients.*—One ounce butter, one onion, one leek, one stick celery, six peeled potatoes, two cloves, salt, pepper, nutmeg, one quart vegetable stock (water, flavoured with vegetables and herbs), three-quarters of a pint of milk, one tablespoonful rice flour, chopped parsley.

METHOD.—Cut up the vegetables and fry them in the butter, without allowing them to become brown, for ten minutes, then moisten them with the stock, add the seasoning, and let the soup simmer until the potatoes are reduced to a pulp. Pass it through a sieve (or a pointed gravy strainer will answer the purpose), and reheat it over the fire; when it boils add half a pint of the milk, and then stir in the remainder smoothly mixed with the rice flour and continue to stir until the soup has thickened. Serve it with chopped parsley scattered over the surface.

BAKED HADDOCK WITH SHRIMPS.—*Ingredients.*—Half pint melted butter sauce, seasoning, half pint shelled shrimps, two small fresh haddock.

METHOD.—Make half a pint of melted butter sauce, using milk and no water; season it well with salt, cayenne, and pepper, and add to it half a pint of picked shrimps. Cut some fillets of fresh haddock into pieces of convenient size, and place two or three in a buttered pie-dish, cover them with the sauce, and then put more fish and more sauce until the dish is full; scatter some bread-crumbs over the top, place a few pieces of butter on the crumbs, and bake in a quick oven until they are evenly browned.

SAVOURY MINCE.—*Ingredients.*—Cooked meat, chopped onion, minced parsley, clarified dripping, thick brown sauce, mushroom (or tomato) catsup, mashed potato, one hard-boiled egg.

METHOD.—Mince some cooked meat coarsely with a sharp knife, season it well with pepper and salt, and add a small quantity of chopped parsley and onion (which has been parboiled before being cut up), and fry the meat in a stewpan which has been evenly spread with some butter or clarified dripping. Stir the mince constantly until it begins to look dry; then add a few spoonfuls of thick brown sauce, a teaspoonful of tomato (or mushroom) catsup; draw the pan to the side of the stove and let the contents simmer for ten minutes. Serve the mince in the middle of a border of mashed potato, and garnish with pieces of hard-boiled egg.

COLLEGE PUDDINGS.—*Ingredients.*—Two eggs, their equivalent weight in butter, sugar, and flour, lemon-peel, red-currant jelly sauce.

METHOD.—Take the weight of two eggs in flour, butter, and sugar. Work the butter to a cream with a wooden spoon, then add the sugar, which should be powdered, the grated peel of a lemon, and the yolks of the eggs; mix well, and sift in the flour by degrees. Beat all together, and stir in lightly the whites of the eggs whisked to a stiff froth. Butter some dariole moulds, half fill them with the mixture, and bake at once in a quick oven. When done, turn the college puddings from the tins and serve with a sauce made as follows poured round the dish: Melt a quarter of a pound of red-currant jelly in a saucepan; add a dessert spoonful of lemon-juice to it, and use as soon as it is thoroughly heated.

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HOW BOATSWAIN JACK WON THE BATTLE OF TRAFALGAR

THE old man, who was sunning himself beside an upturned boat, appeared to be unable to make a choice between another pipe of tobacco and forty winks, while his rather mournful expression suggested a regret that both were at one and the same time impossible.

"Nice morning!" I observed.

"I was jest thinkin' when you come along," he replied, "that the mornin' afore my little affair was wonderful like wot ter-day is."

"Your little affair?" I queried.

"My little affair," he repeated; "Battle o' Trafalgar, yer know."

"Oh!" I gasped. "So you took part in Trafalgar, eh?"

"If I 'adn't 'a' took part, an' a leadin' part, too," replied my companion, "it's a mainmast to a lucifer match poor old Hengland would 'a' 'ad a rough trip, an' that's th' fact. Bo'sun I was—bo'sun aboard the *Balaclava*, told off by Gov'ment ter pertect th' troopship wot was carryin' Cardigan an' th' Light Brigade ter Waterloo. We was only three days out, an' steamin' round Cape 'Orn at twenty-five knots, when orl at once I ketches sight o' th' *Wictory* an' th' 'ole British Fleet ten mile ter starboard flyin' signals o' distress.

"'Eave to, old woollen weskit,' I shouts ter Cardigan. 'We'd better see wot's amiss wi' th' boys.' Then I orders Marconi, who 'appened ter be aboard, ter ask 'em wot was up.

"'We are,' they answers, 'up a tree. Ask Jack th' bo'sun ter come ter th' tube.'

"'Who's askin' fer me?' I sez down th' pipe, while old Cardigan stood by as green as a bit o' seaweed wi' envy.

"'Jack!' sez a voice, pleased like.

"'Orry!' I sez.

"'You're jest in time, Jack,' answers Nelson. 'May I be barnacled if I ain't bit off more'n I can chew this journey. You'll 'ave ter leave th' Light Brigade ter look after theirselves, matey. Your old pal, 'Oratio Nelson, wants yer.'

"'Right-o!' I sez, 'an' 'e shall 'ave me.' 'Old on till I come, 'Orry; I'm a-goin' ter swim it.'

"'Course th' Light Brigade was in a bit of a funk when they 'eard I was leavin' 'em. 'It ain't fair to th' Army,' sez Cardigan, 'is teeth chattering like a tattoo on a kettledrum.

"'It's rough on yer,' sez I, 'an' I ain't goin' ter deny it, but when 'Orry Nelson gives orders yours ain't ter make reply, remember,' and with that I slips through th' port-hole, an' 'arf an hour later I was clamberin' up th' side of th' *Wictory*.

"'Come aboard, gentlemen,' I sez, salutin' th' comp'ny.

"'An' not a minute too soon, Jack, my 'earty,' sez Nelson, shakin' my 'and.

"'You oughtn't to be in any 'ole, 'Orry,' I sez, lookin' round. 'You've got a decent little crowd with yer.' An' 'e 'ad, too, for there was Charlie Beresford, Christopher Columbus, two or three admirals—Admiral Crichton bein' among 'em

(*Continued on page 162.*)

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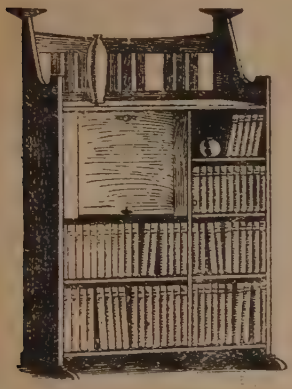

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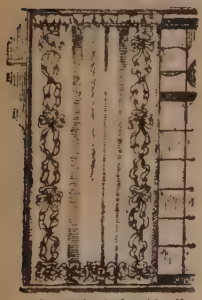

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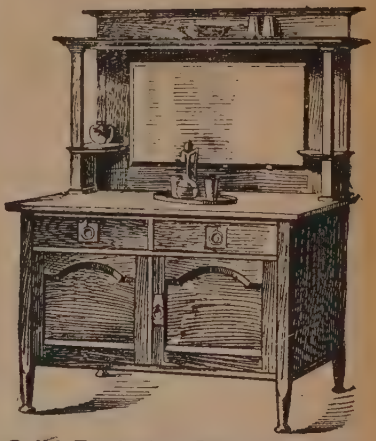

Solid Fumigated Oak Sideboard, fitted with cupboard enclosed by panelled doors, two drawers and large bevelled edge mirror, 3ft. 6ins. wide.

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—an' a little chap they kep' callin' Alf. 'Who's Alf?' I whispers.

"'Alf's Henglish fer Togo,' sez Nelson; then 'e introduces us. 'This 'ere's my old pal Jack wot 'elped me bombard Alexander—Alf,' 'e sez. 'Alec didn't sigh fer more worlds ter conquer when we'd done wi' 'im, I can tell yer; eh, Jack?'

"'Not much 'e didn't,' I larfs; 'but wot's th' trouble now?'

"A black-edged kind o' look come inter Nelson's face. 'The Frenchies is th' trouble,' 'e sez. 'Ther's Bonypart wi' fifty-seven fust-class battleships an' a 'undred an' eight torpeder-boats all round us.'

"'Shiver my timbers!' I sez. 'It's lucky fer you that I swum 'ere under water, then.'

"'Seventy-four battleships an' two 'undred an' fifteen torpeder-boats,' went on Nelson, 'ag'inst our twenty-eight wessels all told, an' them manned by a 'arf-starved crew. Yer see, in th' werry fust brush we 'ad they managed ter cut off our perwision ships, one of 'em chock-full o' plum-puddin's meant fer Christmas; and fer this last fortn't they've been eatin' of 'em an' larfin' at us. It ain't much of a consolation ter know that we collared th' only 'orspital ship they 'ad, 'cos we can't werry well eat their hantibilious pills by way o' returnin' th' compliment.'

"'Bust my bobstays, 'Orry,' I sez, 'why don't yer go fer 'em?'

"'The men ain't got strength ter shovel enough coal ter get steam up,' 'e answers, 'an' th' Frenchies take partic'lar care ter keep their distance. They're playin' "Ring-a-Ring-o'-Roses" wi' us like, an' we're in th' middle.'

"'Got sich a thing as a spare submarine knockin' about?' I asks.

"'Well, we do 'appen to 'ave one,' Nelson sez. 'We've been usin' it as a bread-an'-cheese cupboard lately, 'cos there ain't a soul in all my fifteen wessels wot understands th' brute.'

"'Not one, 'Oratio?' I asks, in a tone wot made 'im see I felt 'urt.

"'Knock me down wi' a marlin-spike, Jack,' 'e sez; 'I was forgettin' you, matey.'

"'Don't mention it, 'Orry,' sez I. 'Load 'er up wi' torpeders, put a couple o' coloured lanterns aboard, an' git ready fer night time an' action. I'm with yer, remember, an' wot me an' Britannia don't know about rulin' th' waves ain't wuth learnin'. If them Frenchies 'ave lost their 'orspital ship, an' they've been eatin' plum-puddin's fer a fortni't, they'll be wantin' a doctor's shop by this time. This 'ere submarine's goin' ter be it, an' yer old messmate's goin' ter be the doctor.'

"At arf arter eight by the Waterbury wot Nelson give me after the relief o' Ladysmith, old Champs Heleesy, th' French admiral, caught sight o' wot 'e took ter be a kind o' ocean-goin' Chemist's Stores anchored on 'is port bow. I'd fixed up a plate-glass winder ter that there submarine, set it out wi' a few torpeders labelled 'Soothin' Syrup' and 'Rough on Rats,' an' popped a big coloured lantern here an' there till a reg'lar Sherlock 'Olmes might 'a' been mistook.

"'Back water every wessel ter th' dispensary,' he shouts, an' on they comes.

(Continued on page 164.)

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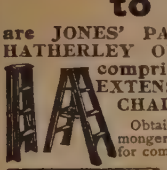

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"'Doctor's shop, ahoy!' sez 'e, when 'e got within' 'ail.

"'Am at your service,' I 'ollers back; then I let fly, an' fer the nex' little while them Frenchies thought they was in a railway accident wot'd got mixed up wi' a Tipperary fair an' a Brock's benefit. In 'arf an hour I was steamin' back ter Nelson wi' close on three 'undred battered 'ulks in tow.

"'Good on ye, Jack!' 'e shouts through th' megaphone. 'Any puddin's left?'

"'As near as I can guess there's about a 'elpin' round,' I sez.

"'Then Hengland expects that every man this day'll do 'is duty to 'em,' he answers, an' up went th' famous signal. And that's th' true 'istory o' 'ow I won th' Battle o' Trafalgar, mister."

The old man stopped and gave me a challenging look.

"But I always understood that Nelson was killed," I remarked. "Wasn't it at Trafalgar that he died saying, 'Kiss me, Hardy'?"

A sigh came from the veracious old gentleman.

"Pore old 'Orry died o' larfin' th' same night," he replied. "My name's 'Ardy."

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